JOHN DOS PASSOS: ART AND IDEOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

Since his first novel in 1920, John Dos Passos has published over thirty-seven books, along with scores of magazine articles and stories. During the twenties and thirties, he was considered with Dreiser, Farrell, Hemingway, and Steinbeck as one of America's finest authors. Sinclair Lewis, for example, hailed Manhattan Transfer in 1925 as the "vast and blazing dawn we have awaited" and claimed that the novel promised to "be the foundation of a whole new school of novel writing. Dos Passos may be, more than Dreiser, Cather, Hergesheimer, Cabell, or Anderson, the father of ... living fiction ... not merely for America but for the world."[1] But after Adventures of a Young Man (1939), Dos Passos' reputation receded with each new work--so much that Maxwell Geismar concluded that The Great Days (1958) marked "perhaps the final step in the process of a literary or fictional decline; it would be hard to go further."[2] When one examines critical explanations for Dos Passos' decline as an artist, he finds that nearly all commentary concerns the relationship of ideology to art, with an almost unanimous supposition that literary merit suffered because Dos Passos underwent a confusing ideological realignment following the Second World War.

It is true that Dos Passos is above all else an ideological writer because his major topics relate directly to social and political ideas. For this reason, Dos Passos' work cannot be considered separate from

ideology. It is also true that the novels published since 1939 are inferior to those written earlier in that the later novels have less intrinsic literary merit. Yet it is certainly not true that Dos Passos has substantially altered the ideological beliefs he held during the twenties and thirties. I believe that the critical confusion which surrounds Dos Passos can be attributed to two primary factors: critical misrepresentation by "special interest" commentators such as the Communist press, and critical disregard or misinterpretation of Dos Passos' stated beliefs. In the first chapter of this thesis, I will attempt to clarify Dos Passos' pre-war ideology by explaining its separate tenets as specifically as possible. In the second chapter, I will analyze Dos Passos' best pre-war fiction, the U. S. A. trilogy, and show its relationship to ideology. The analysis of U. S. A. will be concerned primarily with establishing the reasons for its success as literature. In the third chapter, I will examine Dos Passos' post-war ideology in order to show that it has remained constant. The first and third chapters, therefore, will illustrate critical misrepresentation and misinterpretation of ideology as they have occurred in both the pre-war and post-war periods. In the fourth chapter, I will review the novels that Dos Passos has written since 1945, up to and including Midcentury (1961). I will compare the post-war novels with U. S. A. in order to establish the literary merit of Dos Passos' post-war fiction.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1]Sinclair Lewis, quoted in Dan Wakefield, "Dos, Which Side Are You On?", Esquire, April, 1963, p. 116.

[2]Maxwell Geismar, American Moderns from Rebellion to Conformity (New York, 1958), p. 85.

CHAPTER I

PRE-WAR IDEOLOGY

> The first duty of a man trying to plot a course for clear thinking is to produce words that really apply to the situations he is trying to describe.[1]

John Dos Passos has been simultaneously hailed and damned by literary critics throughout his writing career. Radicals praised his early novels while more staid commentators suggested that they be banned; later, however, radicals denounced his novels while those more to the "right" sang his praises. Such vacillation is not unusual in contemporary America--perhaps because the social upheavals of the twentieth century have given more opportunity to partisan spokesmen--but for Dos Passos the extent of partisan misinterpretation has been incredible. As James T. Farrell states, few writers have been more maltreated and misunderstood than Dos Passos, whose "dignity and seriousness" have been a credit to American literature.[2]

Most critics who deal with Dos Passos' pre-war writing assume that from his first publication through the final volume of U. S. A. he was a "liberal." According to the popular theory, he then gradually moved from left to right on the ideological scale and became a "right-wing conservative" by the forties. Failure by such critics to define their terminology gives rise to much confusion, but an even more serious fault is their refusal to investigate Dos Passos himself.

Almost all criticism of Dos Passos attempts to identify him with one or another current ideology without sufficient consideration of him as an individual. Thus in the thirties Granville Hicks assumed that Dos Passos was ideologically a Communist; when Dos Passos proved not to be a Communist, Hicks assumed that he was politically confused.[3] Hicks, of course, is only one of many who use personal standards in application to Dos Passos' ideology. The effect of such criticism has been to erect a confusing myth about Dos Passos which obscures his actual beliefs. Even unbiased critics have contributed to the confusion surrounding Dos Passos' ideology. One critic, for example, concludes a long study of Dos Passos' so-called ideological "uncertainty" by asserting that Dos Passos is "a man who operated from no fixed philosophical system but rather a man who responded pragmatically through emotion to particular and individual cases ... as they arose."[4] Such serious misunderstanding and confusion can be eliminated only by naming Dos Passos' ideology and defining it objectively.

The term "philosophical conservatism" is applicable to the actions and writings of Dos Passos during the pre-war period. The term is used by Clinton Rossiter in Conservatism in America[5] to refer to those American conservatives who are extremely conscious of the history, structure, and ideals of the United States and who are intent on maintaining and perpetuating them. In this chapter, therefore, I shall define this term in detail and proceed to examine specific major actions and writings of Dos Passos from 1920 through 1939 in order to show the relationship of these actions and writings to philosophical conservatism.

The following is a list of ten beliefs of the philosophical conservative as defined by Rossiter:

1. He believes that "the ends of the free community ... are best served by the interplay of rival forces..."(p. 55). A balance of power where there are "limitations, diffusion, /and/ representation" is a requirement for a free community (p. 33).

2. He is "as much the enemy of the Fascist as he is of the Communist" because he is opposed to any social or political regimentation (p. 18).

3. He understands that "Society cannot be static. Change is the rule of life, for societies as for men" (p. 20). He knows that "preservation may ... call for reform and in demonstrating a willingness to undertake such reform himself ... proves himself to be neither a standpatter nor reactionary" (p. 51).

4. He believes in a practical approach to politics because in the "real" world he must be more concerned with "the possible than the desirable, with the real than the abstract" (p. 49).

5. He insists that "man must treat other men as he would have them treat him; governments must exercise their limited authority with even-handed justice" (p. 46).

6. He believes that three aspects of abstract justice--life, liberty, and property--have a sanction that "transcend human law" (p. 46).

7. He is personally involved in keeping the ideals of the

community intact; he has "the sense of receiving a precious heritage and handing it on intact and perhaps even slightly strengthened" (p. 52).

8. He is extremely conscious of the history, structure, ideals, and traditions of his society; and he tends to idealize the past (pp. 9-10).

9. He believes that individual liberty is of utmost importance for happiness and fulfillment, and that "governments cannot push into the area reserved for the individual" (p. 45).

10. He maintains that Man is a "fabulous composite of some good and much evil, a blend of several ennobling excellencies and several more degrading imperfections" (p. 21). He is constantly aware of the limitations of Man.

Rossiter makes clear that the philosophical conservative need not consider these beliefs as equally important or even accept all of them. Dos Passos does not emphasize property rights at all, but the remainder of these beliefs form the basis for his pre-war ideology. Five areas of influence in Dos Passos' life before 1939 illustrate the extent to which his ideology is based on these beliefs.[6]

Association with the Communist Party

In his biography of Dos Passos, John Wrenn mentions the "myth of Dos Passos the Communist, assiduously propagated in the thirties by Granville Hicks and Michael Gold and others...."[7] Wrenn's point is that Dos Passos never closely identified with the party, even though he published in the Communist press. Many American Communists, however, considered Dos Passos an eloquent spokesman for the party's interest.

They ignored Dos Passos' frequent statements of doubt and proclaimed his novels as steps "toward a new communist world."[8] But in fact Dos Passos never joined the party and never considered it an acceptable ideological position. He was deeply involved in the contradictions inherent in monopoly capitalism and the evils that resulted from large, moneyed groups; and the Communists considered him a spokesman for them because some of his interests paralleled theirs.

In 1926 Dos Passos helped found The New Masses magazine, which was associated with the party and had many Communists as board members and contributors. But in its early life, The New Masses was not exclusively Communist. Martin Kallich points out that for some time the magazine included "liberals and radicals and all rebels against restrictive conventions and money values."[9] Dos Passos discussed his concept of the magazine's function in an early essay entitled "The New Masses I'd Like." Instead of favoring any doctrinaire approach, he suggested that the magazine serve as a "blank sheet for men and women who have never written before to write on as no one has ever written before...."[10] This type of sounding board for the unheard elements in America would be unrestricted, and as such would be better than "an instruction book, whether the instructions come from Moscow or Bethlehem, Pennsylvania."[11] Later The New Masses came into the hands of party professionals, but Dos Passos continued to publish occasional articles in it during the late twenties and early thirties "on the theory that it didn't matter where your work appeared, so long as it was published intact."[12] Dos Passos added, however, that he had ceased caring for the discussions of the "comrades."

As late as 1933, influential Communists such as Michael Gold praised

Dos Passos as a fellow-traveler. Gold wrote that The 42nd Parallel and 1919 prove Dos Passos to be a "militant collectivist" and predicted that the author would soon be "enlisted completely in the service of the cooperative society."[13] Like many others, Gold misinterpreted Dos Passos' attitude toward the party. The portrayal of Communists in 1919 is definitely unsympathetic, and the same characters continued in The Big Money illustrate the absolute failure of Communism as an ideology. Martin Kallich maintained in 1956 that after the death of Sacco and Vanzetti Dos Passos admitted "without equivocation the validity of the Marxian concept...."[14] But in The Theme is Freedom (1956), a compilation of essays with commentary, Dos Passos writes of his actual relationship to the party and refutes those who persist in thinking of him as a Communist or fellow-traveler during the pre-war period:

> The Marxists who are so skillful in the detection and the isolation of heresies used to inveigh against one particular heresy that pleased me particularly. They called it American exceptionalism. During those years of mounting protest against the way things were going in America that label was my refuge. It enabled me to join in the protests of the various breeds of Marxists who were being more and more effectively regimented by the Communist Party without giving up my own particular point of view. I could join my voice to theirs in the outcry against the wave of repression that culminated in the Sacco-Vanzetti case, whereby the great industrial manufacturers were able to use the machinery of the courts and the police power to harass every effort to organize working people into trade unions, without giving up the automatic responses of the plain American patriotism I'd been raised in. If we were going to bring about a revolution in America it must be an American revolution.[15]

Dos Passos published in magazines other than The New Masses which opposed the moneyed interests. He associated himself with the journal Common Sense, which claimed to be "an independent publication ... not

connected with any existing political party."[16] He published in The Nation and the New Republic which he described as "liberal journals in the nineteenth century sense of the word."[17] His only requirements were that the magazines be free from censorship and opposed to what he considered the oppressive forces of monopoly capitalism. He retained his independence at all times. The fact that his beliefs occasionally paralleled the Communist position is insufficient evidence to claim, as many have, that he was closely allied to Communism.

The distrust Dos Passos evidenced for the Communists became strong opposition during the Spanish Civil War. He worked with others in an attempt to persuade the Roosevelt administration to allow the Republican Government to buy arms in America. He attributed their lack of success partly to the Communists who "wanted to take the campaign over for their own purposes" and thereby thwarted a unified effort.[18] Later he went to Spain with Hemingway to write a documentary movie of the war. The director of the film was a party member, and the project failed because of continued interference by the Communists. The splintering of the various anti-Fascist groups by the Communists increased Dos Passos' hatred for Communism. He equally detested Communism and Fascism; he claimed that the "fascist fanaticism and technology and ... the more all-pervading fanaticism and technology of the Communist Party" caused the liberals to be destroyed "under their crossfire."[19] He complained bitterly that the "Fascists and Communists alike shot the best men first" and that "No matter how gallantly a man risked his life ... no matter how well he did his job, he was likely to be suddenly arrested and hurried away and never heard of again."[20]

Sacco and Vanzetti

Dos Passos was influenced by the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti probably more than any other American writer. Martin Kallich believes that the persecution of these two labor radicals forced him to his closest relationship with the Communist Party, and Alfred Kazin argues that Dos Passos' involvement in the case actually helped make him an artist.[21] While these two men were in prison, Dos Passos interviewed them and wrote numerous articles about them. He worked with protest committees and picketed the State House on their behalf. In an essay written in 1927, Dos Passos attributed great symbolic significance to their situation:

> Circumstances sometime force men into situations so dramatic, thrust their puny frames so far into the burning bright searchlights of history that their shadows on men's minds become enormous symbols. Sacco and Vanzetti are the immigrants who have built this nation's industries with their sweat and their blood and have gotten for it nothing but the smallest wage it is possible to give them and a helot's position under the bootheels of the Arrow Collar social order. They are all the wops, hunkies, bohunks, factory fodder that hunger forces through the painful sieve of Ellis Island. They are the dreams of a saner social order of those who can't stand the law of dawg eat dawg.[22]

To Dos Passos, Sacco and Vanzetti were symbols of the denial of civil liberties and as such an insult to democratic ideals. In U. S. A. he considers them as symbols of the "Pilgrim Fathers" and implies that their destruction signifies the death of democracy.[23]

Association with the Labor Movement

During the twenties and thirties, Dos Passos believed that the only effective way the laboring classes could secure the benefits of their society was by organizing. He accepted the idea of meeting the force of established power with the force of workers who were organized well

enough to use the strike as a bargaining method. His work in the movement consisted of membership in various organizations and reporting of labor strife. In 1931 he went with Theodore Dreiser to Harlan County, Kentucky, to report on a labor dispute among the miners there. At this time, Dos Passos was Chairman of the National Committee to Aid Striking Miners Fighting Starvation. Both he and Dreiser favored the cause of the miners, but they attempted to be objective in their reporting. In The Theme is Freedom, Dos Passos recalls the situation:

> All the usual stories of violence legal and illegal against labor agitators, pushed a little further than usual in this case by the violent traditions of the Kentuckians. The miners' soup kitchen had been blown up. There had been gunbattles, mountain style between the strikers and company men. As I remember we really tried to hear both sides. The party members who were trying to direct the course of the proceedings showed a scornful tolerance for our "liberalism."[24]

Dos Passos accepted as fact that "the American businessman had proved himself a conspicuous failure,"[25] but he believed that as a writer his business was to "stay on the sidelines" as long as possible.[26] His reports of labor troubles were remarkably objective, especially when one considers that Dos Passos felt he had "to hurry to get stuff out before the big boys close down on us."[27] For the most part, Dos Passos' essays are accounts of events told through dialogue; and except for an undercurrent of sympathy in tone and a selectivity of detail, they are non-partisan.

Political Affiliation

In 1932 Dos Passos voted for Foster and Ford, the Communist Party presidential and vice-presidential candidates. He had earlier let his name be used in a list of "literary people who said they were going to vote for Foster and Ford in that election."[28] His vote, however, was a

form of protest against the incumbent and the Democratic Party candidate; for Dos Passos had no desire to let the Communists "conduct the revolution in American government" which he believed was needed.[29] He explained later that he knew the Communists had no chance of winning: "It was the old theory of the protest vote. It's a perfectly good way of using the American political machinery.... It was certainly on the same principle that I came to vote in later years for Mr. Dewey of New York."[30] Dos Passos had no idea at the time that many of the governmental changes he favored would be effected by Franklin Roosevelt. He believed Roosevelt's origins in "Groton and Harvard and in the Hudson River aristocracy" would cause him to be aligned with the moneyed interests.[31] Dos Passos soon recognized that Roosevelt was skillful enough as a politician to "prove that America was exceptional,"[32] and he voted for him in 1936 with enthusiasm. Dos Passos approved the fact that "the financial regulators of the economy had been shifted from Wall Street to Washington without anybody's firing a shot" and that "Under Franklin Roosevelt the poorest immigrant, the most neglected sharecropper in the eroded hills came to feel he was a citizen again."[33] Roosevelt's failure to take action against the fascists during the Spanish Civil War caused Dos Passos to lose faith in him; he later claimed that the "deaf and blind selfrighteousness ... which the Greeks based their tragic drama on" had overtaken Roosevelt and that the president had "succumbed to the disease of power."[34] Dos Passos voted for Roosevelt again in 1940; but in The Theme is Freedom, he calls this vote the "political act I have most regretted in my life."[35]

Fiction as Criticism

Dos Passos' earliest important novel, Three Soldiers, was published in 1921. It concerns three American enlisted men in the first world war; but primarily it is the story of John Andrews, a young composer. Andrews joins the army because he has failed to find sufficient order in his civilian life. In his choice of military order as a replacement for individual "disorder," Andrews exhibits an initial failure of nerve; but he becomes increasingly aware of the necessity of individuality as he becomes more and more subordinated to military regimentation. When he understands that highly organized external forces can rob men of their individuality, he begins to think of the military as an "ultimate and unendurable tyranny...."[36] Andrews deserts the army and in Paris attempts to compose a symphony which will illustrate the suppression of liberty. But the military police find him and, at the novel's conclusion, take him away. The other two soldiers, Fuselli and Chrisfield, are in turn destroyed by the military machine and by their own weaknesses.

Three Soldiers is a study in the destruction of individuality. The military "society" slowly reduces man to a machine. When the man reacts to it, as Andrews does with a supreme act of will, the machine ruthlessly crushes him. When Andrews is taken away by the police and the wind scatters his composition over the floor, he is spiritually destroyed.[37]

Between Three Soldiers and U. S. A., Dos Passos published Streets of Night and Manhattan Transfer. The latter novel shows the beginning development of many of the devices that Dos Passos enlarges upon and uses so effectively in the trilogy. The theme of Manhattan Transfer closely parallels the theme of Three Soldiers. Characters from all

levels of society are hopelessly frustrated by their lives in New York City. Their failure to achieve anything permanent or good is due to their loss of individuality in the materialistic environment. New York City is so complex and changeable that the characters can find no fixed standards; as a result they literally and figuratively lose themselves in the city. Only Jimmy Herf salvages a vestige of individuality as he walks aimlessly out of the city at the novel's end.

The three novels of U. S. A. continue Dos Passos' concern with individuality. Almost every character is a victim either of his own weakness or of social forces beyond his control. Dos Passos' point is that defeat is inevitable because all valuable goals are unattainable and all power is corrupt. Even the characters who are capable of understanding and self-knowledge are defeated. Richard Savage, the most intelligent and sensitive character, easily becomes corrupted and loses his individuality. Mary French and Ben Compton are aware of what is wrong with American society and are dedicated to social reform, but they lack the necessary strength and self-will to achieve anything substantial. Robert Spiller believes that the failure of all characters in U. S. A. to be an effective driving power toward good is due to their inherent human weakness. Spiller claims that the characters illustrate "barely restrained human viciousness rather than ..., an inhibited human grandeur."[38] He concludes that U. S. A. is not revolutionary because a revolutionary novel implies that society alone contains the evil. In U. S. A. the society is definitely evil; but the characters are also evil in that they are weak, easily corrupted, or ineffectual.

John Wrenn ignores the extreme pessimism involved in Dos Passos'

characterization and interprets the theme of U. S. A. solely as a struggle for industrial democracy:

> Until people achieved a social system which would give the average man a sense of participation--of responsibility for and pride in his work--the smaller, more vital social units would be ineffective. To achieve that system, the meaning of the old mercantile-agrarian democracy and its libertarian phraseology--liberty, equality, the pursuit of happiness--must somehow be restored in the scientific, urban-industrial present.[39]

The concern with restoring "libertarian phrases" of the past is certainly an important one in U. S. A., but the theme of the trilogy--like the theme of almost all of Dos Passos' fiction--is primarily concerned with the search for or loss of individuality.

Adventures of a Young Man (1939) was Dos Passos only other published novel before the war. It is the first novel of a trilogy which includes Number One and The Grand Design. Glenn Spotswood, the central character of Adventures of a Young Man, is dedicated to correcting social injustice. After involvement in various social movements, Spotswood attempts to subordinate himself to the Communist Party and goes to Spain during the civil war. Like John Andrews in Three Soldiers, Spotswood finds it impossible to efface his individuality. He cannot accept totally the restrictions of Communism because he cannot resolve the contradictions between his concept of liberty and theirs. At the conclusion, Spotswood is senselessly martyred when Communist officials order him to carry water to Republican soldiers under attack.

Although Spotswood is sincere in his convictions, he is so ineffectual as a person that his death lacks the dignity of tragedy. Like all of Dos Passos' characters who fail, he is the victim of an impersonal system and his inherent weakness. But the system itself is the primary evil.

One concludes that it makes no difference if the system--or source of power--is the military society, the urban-industrial society, the "House of Morgan" society, Fascism, or Communism: so long as the system restricts the free and full development of individuality, it is opposed by Dos Passos.

Throughout all of the pre-war novels, the standard by which the power forces are judged is a type of pioneer American democracy. The novels make clear that Americans had forsaken their democratic principles of freedom, tolerance, and social justice and that Dos Passos wished to help re-establish traditional democracy. All of these novels mirror the ideological beliefs that are evident in Dos Passos' actions and nonfiction writing during this period.

Thus Dos Passos' association with the Communist Party and with the labor movement, his involvement in the Sacco and Vanzetti case, his political affiliation, and his social criticism in fiction all contribute toward objectifying a definite ideology. The separate tenets of this ideology correspond almost exactly with the tenets of philosophical conservatism. The list below restates these separate tenets and should be compared point by point with Clinton Rossiter's definition of philosophical conservatism:

1. Dos Passos opposed any type of censorship and insisted on freedom to publish wherever he chose.
2. He opposed any type of social or political regimentation.
3. He believed social change was necessary, but he insisted that extremes were inherently wrong.
4. He insisted on a practical, realistic approach to politics.

5. He believed in a political balance of power.

6. He respected diverse social elements and insisted that all people be treated equally.

7. He believed that freedom, tolerance, and social justice were inviolate abstract principles.

8. He illustrated both an intellectual and emotional reverence for traditional democratic ideals and tended to idealize the past.

9. He believed that individuality was essential for success, both for men and societies, and that freedom of action, economic freedom, and political freedom were necessary for individual fulfillment.

10. He showed a constant awareness of human limitations and illustrated through his fictional characters that man was more evil than good.

Although the above list obviously does not include all of Dos Passos' beliefs, it does contain the major ones. Its chief value is in eliminating confusing ideological terms such as "libertarian anarchism"[40] in application to Dos Passos, and in giving a source of reference to determine ideological consistency after the war. If there are points at which philosophical conservatism and the beliefs of Dos Passos are not parallel, they are few in number and of little consequence. One should perhaps bear in mind Clinton Rossiter's statement that philosophical conservatism "expects only imperfect allegiance from imperfect men."[41]

NOTES

CHAPTER I

[1]John Dos Passos, "Foreward" to William F. Buckley, Up From Liberalism (New York, 1959), p. vii.

[2]James T. Farrell, review of The Great Days, New Republic, April 28, 1958, p. 18.

[3]Granville Hicks, "The Politics of John Dos Passos," Antioch Review, X (March, 1950), p. 98.

[4]Thomas R. Gorman, "Words and Deeds: A Study of the Political Attitudes of John Dos Passos" (unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1960), pp. 101-102.

[5]Clinton Rossiter, Conservatism in America: The Thankless Persuasion, 2nd. ed., (New York, 1962). Page numbers appear parenthetically in the text. Rossiter defines the philosophical conservative as the "highest" or "best" type of conservative and refers to him with these words as well as with the specific term.

[6]Biographical material, such as Dos Passos' illegitimacy, is intentionally omitted due to its excessive subjectivity. For a worthwhile discussion of psychological results see Blanche H. Gelfant, "The Search for Identity in the Novels of John Dos Passos," PMLA, LXXVI (March, 1961), pp. 133-149. For the relationship of John Dos Passos to his father see John Wrenn, John Dos Passos (New York, 1961) and Martin Kallich, "Liberty and the Father-Image," Antioch Review, X (March, 1950), pp. 99-106. Wrenn relates Dos Passos to Telemachus; as Dos Passos returns home as symbolized by the United States, he identifies with his father. Kallich discusses three stages of liberty in Freudian terms.

[7]John Wrenn, John Dos Passos (New York, 1961), p. 65.

[8]Michael Gold, "The Education of John Dos Passos," English Journal, XXII (February, 1933), p. 87.

[9]Martin Kallich, "John Dos Passos Fellow-Traveler: A Dossier with Commentary," Twentieth Century Literature, I (January, 1956), p. 177.

[10]Dos Passos, "The New Masses I'd Like," quoted in John Dos Passos, The Theme is Freedom (New York, 1956), p. 8.

[11]Dos Passos, quoted in John Wrenn, John Dos Passos, p. 64.

[12]Dos Passos, The Theme is Freedom, p. 40.

[13]Gold, "The Education of John Dos Passos," p. 87.

[14]Kallich, "John Dos Passos Fellow-Traveler: A Dossier with Commentary," p. 178.

[15]Dos Passos, The Theme is Freedom, p. 10.

[16]Quoted in Wrenn, John Dos Passos, p. 67.

[17]Dos Passos, The Theme is Freedom, p. 41.

[18]Ibid., p. 115.

[19]Ibid., pp. 114-115.

[20]Ibid., p. 137.

[21]Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York, 1956), p. 275.

[22]Dos Passos, quoted in The Theme is Freedom, p. 15. The essays dealing with the Sacco and Vanzetti case that are included in The Theme is Freedom appeared originally in Facing the Chair, a pamphlet published in Boston by the Sacco and Vanzetti Defense Committee in 1927.

[23]Dos Passos, U. S. A. /The 42nd Parallel, 1919, The Big Money/ (New York, n.d.), p. 437.

[24]Dos Passos, quoted in The Theme is Freedom, p. 75.

[25]Ibid., p. 73.

[26]Ibid., p. 85.

[27]Dos Passos, in a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, quoted in The Crack-Up, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York, 1945), p. 311.

[28]Dos Passos, The Theme is Freedom, p. 101. Novelists on the list included Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Erskine Caldwell, and Waldo Frank; critics who signed included Edmund Wilson, Newton Arvin, Malcolm Cowley, and Granville Hicks; journalists who signed included Lincoln Steffens, Matthew Josephson, and Ella Winter. For a discussion of the significance of this list and related "defections" of intellectuals see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Crisis of the Old Order (Boston, 1957), pp. 436-437.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid., p. 161.

[33]Ibid., pp. 161-162.

[34]Ibid., p. 149.

[35]Ibid., p. 161.

[36]Gelfant, "The Search for Identity in the Novels of John Dos Passos," p. 133.

[37]Ibid., p. 142.

[38]Robert E. Spiller et al., Literary History of the United States (New York, 1953), p. 1303.

[39]Wrenn, John Dos Passos, p. 157.

[40]Kallich, "Liberty and the Father-Image," p. 106.

[41]Rossiter, Conservatism in America, p. 66.

CHAPTER II

U. S. A.

> It's the quality of detaching itself from its period while embodying its period that marks a piece of work as good.[1]

The philosophical conservatism that Dos Passos expresses in Three Soldiers and Manhattan Transfer reaches its finest expression in U. S. A. The Sacco and Vanzetti case had symbolized the ultimate repression of liberty and justice in the United States, and the execution of these two anarchists served as a catalyst to direct Dos Passos' creative energies toward a thunderous denunciation of monopoly capitalism. Whereas Three Soldiers treats man's loss of individuality in the mechanized establishment of the military and Manhattan Transfer treats man's loss of identity within the metropolis, U. S. A. deals with the whole populace of the United States and its loss of liberty. Monopoly capitalism, according to the author, has caused such deterioration of traditional American ideals that the country has become a wasteland of lost hope. The theme of U. S. A. is concerned with the impossibility of individual fulfillment in a society controlled by the "exploiters and wreckers who have made a wasteland of America and have deprived the people of their heritage."[2]

The theme of U. S. A. is stated most directly in The Big Money.

In camera eye number forty-nine, the first person narrator recalls that the pilgrims who landed at Plymouth were the original "haters of oppression." The significance of the pilgrims has been lost because Americans in modern society misuse their tradition. Democracy can live again only if men rebuild the "ruined words worn slimy in the mouths of lawyers districtattorneys collegepresidents judges."[3] But the resurrection of democracy is not likely. The destruction of ideals of independence and tolerance has been too complete. U. S. A. provides no answer to the question of how men are to rebuild the tradition; its theme is totally pessimistic in that it states no solution, suggests no panacea for the problem that confronts America. It only relates the problem and mourns the country's defeat:

> America our nation has been beaten by strangers who have turned our language inside out who have taken the clean words our fathers spoke and made them slimy and foul ...
> America our nation has been beaten by strangers who have bought the laws and fenced off the meadows and cut down the woods ... and turned our pleasant cities into slums and sweated the wealth out of our people....[4]

The passionate lament of camera eye number fifty for America's loss of traditional democracy is the climax of the trilogy. All three novels move with gathering momentum toward the ultimate lamentation of despair, "we stand defeated America."[5]

U. S. A. is limited in time to the first third of the twentieth century; yet over twenty-five years after publication, it remains significant and powerful fiction. The enduring quality of U. S. A. is certainly not sociological, although it contains elements of great sociological interest. It endures as significant fiction because it creates a convincing and urgent sense of reality by interrelating

diverse characters and original structure and style, all of which help develop and communicate the theme. Because of their importance to the success of U. S. A., character, structure, and style merit separate consideration here.

The characters of U. S. A. are of two types, fictional and biographical. The fictional characters exist in the dramatic present, within a society that has already lost or is rapidly losing the last of its democratic heritage. The biographical characters have created the society of the present. Certain of them, such as Debs, Haywood, LaFollette, and Veblen, fought for democracy in the past. These biographies recall moments when men opposed and were punished for opposing the direction society was taking. In his study of U. S. A., John Aldridge states that the defeat of the biographical "oppositionists" is "the real tragedy" that U. S. A. recounts.[6] Their opponents in this earlier battle were men such as Ford, Carnegie, Morgan, and Hearst. With the victory of these men (who are, of course, monopoly capitalists), the death of traditional democracy took place.

When the fictional characters are understood to be living in a society already bereft of its heritage, their universal failure to achieve fulfillment cannot be considered a fault in Dos Passos' characterization. The point of view is retrospective because democracy has already been lost; and criticism of the characters for lacking a "higher role"[7] is meaningless. Within the tragic conception, the characters function as people who--regardless of their attributes, beliefs, or actions--are foredoomed by what has come before.

Altogether U. S. A. has over one hundred named characters. Of

these, twelve are primary, thirteen are secondary, and twenty-seven are biographical.[8] In relation to the theme, all characters fall into one of three groupings: those who support the society; those who oppose the society; and those who may support or oppose the society at different times, but who are essentially uncommitted. The list below groups these characters accordingly; the secondary characters are noted with an asterisk and the biographical characters are italicized:

SUPPORT	OPPOSE	UNCOMMITTED
J. Ward Moorehouse	Ben Compton	Richard Ellsworth Savage
Charley Anderson	Mary French	Eveline Hutchins
Margo Dowling	Mac	Joe Williams
Eleanor Stoddard	Daughter	Del*
Janey Williams	Don Stevens*	Paul Johnson*
George Barrow*	Helen Mauer*	Tony*
Doc Bingham*	Bill Cermak*	*Luther Burbank*
Agnes Mandeville*	*Eugene Debs*	*William Jennings Bryan*
Frank Mandeville*	*Big Bill Haywood*	*Thomas Edison*
Sam Margolies*	*Bob LaFollette*	*Steinmetz*
Rodney Cathcart*	*Jack Reed*	*Theodore Roosevelt*
Tex*	*Randolph Bourne*	*Woodrow Wilson*
Frederick W. Taylor	*Paxton Hibben*	*Isadora Duncan*
Henry Ford	*Joe Hill*	*Rudolph Valentino*
W. Randolph Hearst	*Wesley Everest*	*The Wright Brothers*
Samuel Insul	*Thorstein Veblen*	
Minor C. Keith	*Frank Lloyd Wright*	
Andrew Carnegie		
J. P. Morgan		

The most representative fictional character among those who support the society is J. Ward Moorehouse. His story is developed from his birth--ironically on the fourth of July--in *The 42nd Parallel* to about age forty-seven in *The Big Money*. During this time he builds a successful public relations business, marries and divorces one wife and becomes alienated from his second. As his wealth and influence increase, his personal life becomes futile and barren, until in *The Big Money* he is seen as a sick man, old before his time, in a room lined with "unscratched

sets of the leading authors in morocco," who laments that "once upon a time I was planning to be a songwriter."[9]

When Moorehouse is introduced in the first novel, the reader sympathizes with him as an energetic and personable youth who neither smokes nor drinks and is "keeping himself clean for the lovely girl" he someday plans to marry.[10] Although his romantic outlook is quite real, his first marriage is a calculated compromise of his principles. The girl he is involved with is already pregnant by another man. The reader sympathizes and even identifies with Moorehouse's predicament until Moorehouse overhears two bellhops discussing her previous exploits and their prospects with her. It suddenly becomes apparent to Moorehouse that he is only a scapegoat and that the marriage will violate his idealism. The reader expects him to rebel at this point:

> Johnny folded up the paper quietly and walked out onto the porch. He walked down the street without seeing anything. For a while he thought he'd go down to the station and take the first train out and throw the whole business to ballyhack, but there was the booklet to get out ... and this connection with money and the Strangs; opportunity knocks but once at a young man's door. He went back to his cottage and locked himself in his bedroom. He stood a minute looking at himself in the glass of the bureau. The neatly parted light hair, the cleancut nose and chin; the image blurred.[11]

Here Moorehouse breaks the stereotype of the hardworking, idealistic youth that Dos Passos has intentionally developed. The reader is shocked into an awareness of Moorehouse's weakness and an awareness of the forces in the society that operate on him. This initial shock turns to despair as Moorehouse subsequently develops into a "perversion of /the new century's/ ideals and a burlesque of his own earlier hopes."[12] Symbolically, of course, Moorehouse loses his freedom as his image blurs.

Moorehouse is identified with the society from this point on. He

makes contacts with businessmen while on his European honeymoon, returns and divorces his wife. He later marries another wealthy woman and induces her mother to invest fifty thousand dollars into his new public relations business. One of his first actions in his new capacity is to call in Judge Planet (a self-concerned representative of management who later becomes a senator) and George Barrow (a shallow and untrustworthy union representative who appears throughout the trilogy). Moorehouse outlines to them a plan to peaceably settle labor disputes. Although the plan is obviously beneficial to management and harmful to labor, both men approve of it. Moorehouse, however, never doubts that his self-interest corresponds to the country's interest. He is perfectly sincere when he talks later of the "good work" he is doing "keeping the public informed ... and stemming the propaganda of sentimentalists and reformers, upholding American ideas against ... the panaceas of discontented dirtfarmers in the Northwest."[13]

After becoming a publicist for business, Moorehouse causes increasing harm. He is influential in further corrupting Planet and Barrow. With no actual intent, he causes Janey Williams, his secretary, to forsake her individuality and become a sexless and brittle devotee to his business. Another primary character, Eleanor Stoddard, his confidant and one time lover, becomes a barren career woman partly because he can offer so little of himself. And his second wife, Gertrude Staple, withdraws from him altogether into helpless schizophrenia.

The life of Moorehouse is completely integrated with Dos Passos' subject, for Moorehouse is symbolic of the corruption of the society.

Yet he is a realized character. He is credible in that he commits no action that the reader finds improbable. Even his initial forsaking of his idealism with his first marriage is credible when one recalls that as a child he "maneuvered" a corner on agates as the school marble champion and rented them out "for ten cents a week for ten."[14] Dos Passos never treats him as a simple villain, but instead shows him as a limited person who is incapable of self-awareness. After his first marriage ends, for example, Moorehouse attempts to understand why his life seems to have gone wrong: "He'd go over and over his whole course of action.... He must have made a mistake somewhere but he couldn't see where."[15] This is his same position at the end of his narrative, though during the interim he climbs to the peak of success offered by the society.

The excellence of Moorehouse as a character derives in part from the physical description that Dos Passos gives him. From an athletic youth, Moorehouse deteriorates rapidly, so that when he returns from his second honeymoon he appears much older than his age of thirty-two. He is reminiscent of William Dean Howell's Bartley Hubbard in A Modern Instance, who physically deteriorates as he becomes morally irresponsible. Moorehouse changes from a handsome young man to a "biggish" blue-eyed man with a "thick jowl" who does publicity work for the Y. M. C. A. in 1919, to a pale-eyed, extremely fat man whose "considerable belly" waggled "from side to side as he walked" in The Big Money.[16] Even his hands change to "two pudgy strangely hicklooking hands with liverspots on them."[17] This description relates to the theme while it personalizes Moorehouse, so that the reader is given an understanding of him both as

an idea and as a man. When he laments the lost idealism of his youth in The Big Money, the reader can almost sympathize with him as a man; yet shortly afterward a minor character describes him aptly as only an idea: "After all J. Ward Moorehouse isn't a man ... it's a name.... You can't feel sorry when a name gets sick."[18]

The lives of other primary characters who support the society follow much the same pattern. Charley Anderson rises from a young man (uncommitted) to a position of wealth and influence. His interest in an aircraft industry and the invention of a starter get him to a position where he can play the stock market. But like Moorehouse, as soon as he begins to speculate and live off the earnings of others, he deteriorates. When Anderson begins by buying the available stock in the Askew-Merritt Corporation for the purpose of undercutting his partners, his economic rise begins; and he too becomes identified with the society. Dos Passos describes him subtly at this crucial point:

> The bills were crisp and new, straight from the bank. He brought them up to his nose to sniff the new sharp smell of the ink. Before he knew what he'd done, he'd kissed them.... Jesus, he was feeling good. His new blue suit fitted nicely.... His belly felt hard under his belt.[19]

Anderson's elation is short lived. He becomes involved in an unhappy marriage and soon laments to Bill Cermak, an employee who has complimented him on his success, "What's the use if your wife won't sleep with you?"[20] The rest of Anderson's life is a frenetic attempt to hold his easily gained wealth. He has a pathetic affair with Margo Dowling, another primary character who prostitutes herself to the society. Shortly before Anderson's death from peritonitis, she describes him as "a beefy florid guy who looked older than he was, a big talker, and

hard to handle when he'd been drinking."[21] Dowling goes on to become a successful Hollywood actress who marries her producer and sleeps with the male lead in her movies. She succeeds most financially when she contributes least; but at the end of The Big Money, she also is seen as a failure because her voice is not suitable for talking movies.

The most sympathetically treated characters in U. S. A. are Ben Compton and Mary French, two radicals who devote their lives to opposing the society. Compton is mentioned as a youth in The 42nd Parallel and enters as a primary character late in 1919. The first twenty-three years of his life are then condensed into twenty-nine pages, as Dos Passos develops him from a boy with intensely patriotic convictions to an activist in labor disputes. He is severely beaten at one point for admitting he is a Wobbly, but he continues his work in free speech fights and on strike committees. He is arrested after speaking at a Communist rally and finally sentenced to Atlanta prison for his refusal to serve in the army. His narrative ends as he leaves for prison on his twenty-third birthday.

Compton's life illustrates the impossibility of successfully opposing the society. He is dismissed from jobs, jailed, beaten, and finally imprisoned for lawful opposition to the evils he sees. When released from prison in The Big Money, he is almost ruined physically. His face is "white as a mushroom with sags of brownish skin under the eyes;" he cannot sleep and is so nervous that he "can't stay alone."[22] He continues to oppose the society, however, and works with the Communists. He lives with Mary French and considers marrying her, but his dedication to the labor movement conflicts with his personal desires:

> Once they decided they'd get married and have a baby, but the comrades were calling Ben to come and organize the towns around Passaic and he said it would distract him from his work.... Now was the time to fight.... He said they had to sacrifice their personal feelings for the working-class, and he stormed out of the house in a temper. In the end she had an abortion....[23]

Comptom so involves himself in opposition to the society that he fails to realize that by his actions he becomes "an appendage of the machine,"[24] for he subordinates himself to the Communist organization. His intent is to work with the most useful group which represents the working class, and he later does work with various radical and socialist groups. Because of his work outside the Communist organization, he is expelled from the party. He explains his expulsion to Mary French:

> I've been expelled from the party ... oppositionist ... exceptionalism ... a lot of nonsense.... Well, that doesn't matter, I'm still a revolutionist ... I'll continue to work outside of the party.[25]

Thematically, Compton's expulsion repeats Dos Passos' belief in the inherent evil of any large, tightly organized group. Obviously the Communists cannot effectively combat the society because they allow no more room for individual freedom than the society itself. But Compton has given himself so completely to the cause of the working class that his treatment at the hands of the Communists literally breaks him. He is even unable to enter relief work where the "discipline isn't so strict" because he is considered a "disrupting influence."[26] Like all the primary characters in U. S. A., Compton laments the loneliness of his life. He tells Mary French that "if we hadn't been fools, we'd have had that baby that time ... we'd still love each other...."[27]

The failure of Compton's life parallels the failure of those who support the society in that he is personally defeated. He is the most

sympathetic of all characters because at the end he is attempting to understand why he has lost. He has far more insight that Moorehouse who makes a feeble attempt to understand why his life has gone wrong. Compton recognizes that the forfeiture of his personal desires has been instrumental in his failure:

> You see, often a young guy thinks, I'll sacrifice everything, and then when he is [sic] cut off all that side of his life, he's not as good as he was, do you see?[28]

Mary French serves as the character through whose eyes the reader sees the various radical elements. While doing social work, she meets and has an affair with George Barrow. She becomes pregnant and has an abortion by a doctor he "recommends." French comes to hate Barrow, but less for personal reasons than for his part in "selling out" the steel workers in the settling of a strike.[29] Through Ben Compton she enters radical politics and works with strike committees in attempts to alleviate the suffering that the strikes cause for the workers' families. After her second abortion, she breaks with Compton and begins work with the Sacco and Vanzetti defense committee. Her third affair is with Don Stevens, a Communist who also works with the committee. Stevens is an aggressive, intelligent man whom Dos Passos typifies as the best of the party. When it becomes apparent that Sacco and Vanzetti are doomed, Stevens says with an "aloof, sarcastic coolness" that it no longer matters "whether they are saved or not ... it's the power of the workingclass that's got to be saved."[30] Steven's attitude contrasts sharply with the dogged determination of Compton and the purely emotional approach of French, for Stevens obviously represents a totally intellectual view. The force of his character causes French

to submit to the coldly logical party line. She acts as his secretary and becomes so subordinated to him that she loses "all her initiative" and is "least unhappy when running ... small errands for him."[31] This limited type of fulfillment soon ends, for Stevens is called to Moscow by the party. When he returns, he brings an English Comrade whom he has married on party orders. For some time afterwards, French is incapable of any action: "She didn't seem to have any will left. It would take her a half an hour to decide to get up to go to the toilet."[32] Like the other primary characters, her life is a study in defeat. Although she never agrees with the violent tactics of the Communists and is never a party member, she loses her individuality and all chances for personal happiness. At the close of The Big Money, she returns to work on a relief committee; but immediately before leaving, she admits to George Barrow that she has "no feelings at all any more."[33]

The relationship of Compton and French to the theme of U. S. A. is more obvious than that of the other characters. They are representatives of the best people the country can produce, and their defeat makes the evils of the society dramatically clear. Their failure to achieve any kind of personal fulfillment makes evident that democracy has already been lost. Both of them are believable characters, however, because Dos Passos gives them personal motives for all of their actions. French is influenced a great deal by the different men in her life, but perhaps even more by rebellion against her mother. Compton is undoubtedly attempting to make some sort of compensation for his Jewish family. Compton is presented in the short section in 1919 as a type (almost, even, as a biographical character); but his narrative in 1919 is so

concentrated that the reader does not consider him as a thematic pawn. When Compton enters later in the Mary French narrative, he becomes individualized. Of course, when he begins questioning the Communist Party and musing on its relationship to him, he has more individuality than any other primary character. French reacts emotionally to different aspects of the radical movement. She never seems manipulated by the author because her personality is always involved in her actions.

Richard Ellsworth Savage is the most thoroughly treated character in U. S. A. At varying points, he acts or thinks in opposition to the society; and at the conclusion he seems to support it. But he never gives himself wholeheartedly to any view and throughout is essentially uncommitted. Dos Passos shows Savage as an ambivalent person who is by nature unable to fully commit himself. As a youth in 1919, he writes poetry and has an affair with the wife of a minister. Immediately after the beginning of the affair, Savage thinks of killing himself, "but he was afraid of going to hell; he tried to pray, at least to remember the Lord's Prayer. He was terribly scared when he found he couldn't even remember the Lord's Prayer."[34] But when a friend arrives later, Savage talks "very big to him about women and sin and about how he was in love with a married woman."[35] Savage begins early to insinuate himself into the confidence of those who can help him. Initially these actions seem natural results of his personality rather than calculated attempts to gain advancement. For instance, he is helped through Harvard by Hiram Halsey Cooper, whom "Dick delighted ... by dedicating to him a verse translation of Horace's poem about Maecenas that he worked up with the help of the trot...."[36] During his last year at Harvard, Savage wins

first prize in a magazine contest with a group of his sonnets, "but the editors wrote back that they would prefer a note of hope in the last sestet. Dick put in the note of hope."[37]

Like Moorehouse, Savage originally secures the sympathy of the reader. He appears such an appealing stereotype of a sensitive young man that the reader accepts him as such until he becomes aware of the subtle characterization that Dos Passos employs. The author creates a "foreground" and a "background" of Savage's character that cannot be reconciled. The foreground shows him to be sensitive and creative, concerned with the world and his place in it; but behind this outward appearance, Savage is selfish and vacillating. The reader is shocked into an awareness of Savage's inadequacy as a person when he fails to act on his announced beliefs. He is opposed to conscription and joins the ambulance service during the war. While waiting to be sent back to the states after having written "indiscreet" letters home, he is faced with an opportunity to escape the things he considers evil:

> One day he saw a pocket compass in a jeweller's window on the Rue de Rivoli. He went in and bought it; there was suddenly a fullformed plan in his head to buy a civilian suit, leave his uniform in a heap on the wharf at Bordeaux and make for the Spanish border.[38]

Once his escape is planned, Savage thinks of writing verse again. He claims that what people need are "stirring poems to nerve them for revolt against their cannibal governments."[39] But while waiting for an opportunity to make good his escape, Savage meets a friend who is also being sent back to the states. They drink together for several days and take the ship. During the interim Savage has com-

pletely forgotten his individualistic plan to escape. He realizes that he has forfeited his independence when he discovers the compass:

> All the crossing they were never sober after eleven in the morning.... One night ... Dick was searching in his pocket for a cigarette when his fingers felt something hard in the lining of his coat. It was the little compass he had bought to help him across the Spanish border. Guiltily, he fished it out and dropped it overboard.[40]

Cooper is at the dock when the ship arrives, and he soon gets Savage a commission as a second lieutenant. As an officer, Savage is what he has claimed hatred of; and when he returns to Europe, he is no longer a possible opponent of the society. He begins having an affair with Daughter, another primary character in 1919, and talks to her of what he observes at the peace conference and of the hypocrisy of the delegates:

> ... oh, we don't know anything and we're grinding them all underfoot....It's the sack of Corinth... they think he's /Wilson/ going to give them peace, give them back the cosy beforethewar world. It makes you sick to hear all the speeches.... Oh Christ, let's stay human as long as we can ... not get reptile's eyes and stone faces and ink in our veins instead of blood....I'm damned if I'll be a Roman.[41]

Although this passage seems to indicate a social consciousness, his position is altogether a personal one. He feels no obligation toward society and makes this clear when he says "To hell with them all."[42]

Dos Passos implies through Savage that individuality based on selfishness is no better than subordination to an impersonal force. When Daughter becomes pregnant, Savage refuses to marry her even though he has led her to believe he will. He tries to convince her to marry George Barrow and tells her that they "have to be sensible

about things."[43] He feels "terribly sorry" about her situation but is not capable of accepting moral responsibility for his part in it. Dos Passos excellently characterizes him as he goes to bed after ridding himself of Daughter:

> Poor Anne Elizabeth. Poor Dick. He lay shivering between the clammy sheets, his eyes were pinned open with safetypins.
>
> Gradually he got warmer. Tomorrow. Seven-thirty: shave, buckle puttees ... Jingling spurs to office, Sergeant Ames at ease. Day dragged out in khaki; twilight tea at Eleanor's, make her talk to Moorehouse to clinch his job after the signing of the peace. Dun, drab, khaki. Poor Dick got to go to work after the signing of the peace. Poor Tom's cold. Poor Dickeyboy ... Richard ... He brought his feet up to where he could rub them. Poor Richard's feet. After the signing of the peace. By the time his feet were warm he'd fallen asleep.[44]

As he takes the fetal position and thinks in the language pattern of a child, Savage seems the perpetual child-adult whose selfishness keeps him from maturity. By the end of 1919, he has lost the reader's sympathy by his failure to accept responsibility for his actions or for the society. He is distraught by the death of Daughter, but he sees it only as "a frightfully tough break."[45]

Savage also has a part as a primary character in The Big Money. Here he is an executive for Moorehouse who cynically prostitutes his abilities in the advertising business. He drinks excessively and has deteriorated physically so that there is a "puffy boiled look under the eyes like in the photographs of the Prince of Wales," and he feels "sour and gone in the middle like a rotten pear."[46] Others see him as a man "who doesn't give a damn;"[47] but when drunk near the end of the novel, he too laments the defeat of his life:

> When they asked him why he didn't get married himself he confusedly had some more drinks and said his life was a shambles. He made fifteen thousand a year but he never had any money. He knew a dozen beautiful women but he never had a girl when he needed her.[48]

But Savage has lost all ability to care deeply about anything. His work for Moorehouse supports the society, but Savage personally remains uncommitted. When Moorehouse has a heart attack, Savage is almost "tearful," but he takes the opportunity of Moorehouse's weakness to pressure him for a raise.[49] Savage's narrative ends with his completely hypocritical refusal to vouch for a friend because of the friend's drinking.[50] At this concluding point, Savage appears to have stepped into Moorehouse's position as head of the advertising agency.

Structure

In the same manner that the thematic concern of U. S. A. owes to the novels that precede it, the structure owes directly to Three Soldiers and Manhattan Transfer. These two earlier works are experiments in presenting social cross sections as a unity and in presenting a social segment as character. In Three Soldiers Dos Passos uses Fusselli, Chrisfield, and Andrews as individuals who form a society which reacts to the larger military society. In Manhattan Transfer, the city of New York usurps the dignity and individuality of those caught up in its "mad pursuit of success."[51] The complexity of the city compliments the complexity of the plot. Over fifty characters struggle within the confusion of the city in a futile attempt to find their identity, and the chaos of the city parallels the chaos within the characters. In U. S. A. Dos Passos enlarges the experi-

mental techniques of these two novels to state essentially the same theme, that true success can be achieved only by "self-reliance, freedom, /and/ a joy in living...."[52] In addition to these techniques, he invents the devices of newsreels, camera eyes, and poetic biographies.

On the simplest level, the structure of U. S. A. functions to present the movement of time. Newsreels, biographies, and camera eyes are interspersed between fictional narratives to give occasional "focus" to the seeming incoherence of historical movement. This is obviously analagous to moving pictures which flash before the eye at great speed, then suddenly stop to allow the eye to focus upon a particular scene before they begin to move again. However, this structural focusing is more complex than a mere time device. The biographies capture the reader's sympathy for those who oppose the society, and thus "focus" the reader's emotions in regard to the theme. Likewise, the biographies of those who support the society--such as Morgan and Hearst--focus the reader's anger. The camera eyes secure the reader's empathy with the first person narrator and thus personalize both the historical action and the theme.

Some critics object to this "photographic art" as only a surface representation of life,[53] but one must admit that within the scope of Dos Passos' conception, it works remarkably well. The total purpose of the structure is to present an effect of chaos to compliment the chaos in the lives of the characters. The structure, therefore, helps to communicate the theme. The artistic necessity of unity is achieved in an original and subtle way so that the reader has a sense of direction

which does not interfere with the theme. To understand the structure of the trilogy, one must understand how the disparate elements give it unity.

A broad type of unity is achieved by the movement of the fictional narratives. Ultimately all characters, regardless of their relationship to the theme, converge on one point--failure to achieve fulfillment. During the course of their development, different fictional narratives cross one another so that the same events are seen through the eyes of more than one person. For example, the burning of the American tanker in the harbor at Genoa is seen through Savage (1919 p. 197). While watching the tanker, Savage encounters Joe Williams whom he does not know. Later, in the Joe Williams' narrative, the same encounter is retold from Williams' point of view (1919 p. 236). Other like devices which serve as meeting points are Eleanor's apartment in Paris and Eveline's parties in New York City. An action or conversation relative to the theme always occurs at these points.

Each novel of the trilogy is more despairing than its predecessor as the whole work moves with increasing momentum toward camera eye fifty in The Big Money. The reader becomes more involved as the theme becomes more apparent. The first novel relates the early strivings for material success in the new century and ends with the despair of the war. 1919 covers less historical time and has a fragmented structural quality due to the loose time relationship of the Daughter narrative. Her story begins after the signing of the armistice in the Joe Williams' narrative and is traced from her childhood up to and through the signing of the same armistice in her narrative. The chaotic narrative

structure of 1919 complements the chaos of the war and its immediate aftermath. In The Big Money the character narratives are much more tightly integrated. Charley Anderson's story is the only one developed for the first one hundred pages. Of the four primary characters in The Big Money, two (Anderson and Savage) have been dealt with earlier as primary characters. The others, Margo Dowling and Mary French, are quickly sketched from childhood to maturity. From then onward all characters move simultaneously in time. Individual events are seldom taken from separate points of view, and the effect is a rapid acceleration in the movement toward despair.

The newsreels, camera eyes, and biographies have structural functions other than those mentioned above. The newsreels are cuttings from newspapers which are subordinate to the society. They achieve meaning by the irony implied when different "facts" are stated side by side. This irony makes a comment which relates clearly to the theme and actually provides a different manner of stating it. In the first novel, optimistic comments on the new century and the opinions of important persons are transposed with labor dissatisfactions and unrest. This is well illustrated by NEWSREEL VI:

> HARRIMAN SHOWN AS RAIL COLOSSUS
>
> noted swindler run to earth
>
> TEDDY WIELDS BIG STICK
>
> straphangers demand relief[54]

In 1919 most of the newsreels comment on the war, treatment of labor and its leaders, and on irrational violence:

COMING YEAR PROMISES REBIRTH OF
RAILROADS

Debs Is Given 30 Years In Prison

There's a long long trail awinding
Into the land of my dreams....

future generations will rise up and call those men
blessed who have the courage of their convictions....

BONDS BUY BULLETS BUY BONDS

COPPERS INFLUENCED BY UNCERTAIN
OUTLOOK

...

KILLS HERSELF AT SEA;... 55

In the last novel, the irony becomes extreme as the country's boom period is shown in opposition to the plight of workers and organizers:

> when things are upset, there's always chaos,
> said Mr. Ford. Work can accomplish wonders and
> overcome chaotic conditions. When the Russian
> masses will learn to want more than they have,
> when they will want white collars, soap, better
> clothes, better shoes, better housing, better
> living conditions
>
> I lift up my finger and I say tweet tweet
> shush shush
> now now
> come come.[56]

The irony of the newsreels directs the reader because he naturally wishes to be opposite the side being ridiculed. Thus the reader unconsciously moves toward a position which commits him to opposing the society.

The camera eye is a first person narrator who grows from childhood to maturity during the time covered by U. S. A. During the first two novels, the camera eye records personal, usually

sensory, impressions of the social milieu. The camera eye seems to present an objective observer of the historical action who functions much like the reader, who is also observing the historical action; but late in The Big Money, the first person singular of the camera eye changes to the first person plural as he becomes totally identified with the opposition to the society. Because of his empathy with the camera eye, the reader also tends to identify with the first person plural and opposes the society. Through implication, the reader shares the observer's lament in camera eye fifty, "We stand defeated America."[57]

The order of the biographies helps unify U. S. A. There are four biographical characters who oppose and two who support the society in The 42nd Parallel; four who oppose and one who supports it in 1919; and two who oppose and four who support it in The Big Money. The biographical characters in the first novel who oppose the society are extremely active, historically important men. Those who oppose it in the second novel are of little historical importance, and two of them are mere victims. In the last novel, however, the two who oppose the society are the most intelligent, gifted, and most sympathetically treated of all the biographical characters.

One other structural device adds to the unity of U. S. A. The introductory and concluding prose poems serve to unite the whole work by showing what seems to be the same young man searching for his place in America. The first one has "no job, no woman, no house, no city" but his mind is full of hope. The concluding one reiterates the plight of the young man out of work who belongs nowhere and has nothing. His eyes are "black with want" as he "waits with swimming head" for a ride

to take him out of the city. The close relationship of the beginning and end as shown through the vagrant youth makes it clear to the reader that the society cannot satisfy the needs of the individual, that, in fact, the individual in the United States is totally disinherited.

STYLE

Much of the success of U. S. A. is a result of the manner that the style fulfills the needs of the different kinds of structure. The style of the fictional narratives differs from the camera eyes, and both of these styles differ from the biographies and prose poems. The narratives are told with emphasis on details of character and setting which create a convincing sense of reality. The narratives do not, however, depend on superfluous detail. The result of Dos Passos' style in the prose narratives is a tight, highly concentrated effect that causes the reader to feel that great energy is being restrained. Dos Passos almost never intrudes on the illusion of objectivity that is created in the narratives; and when the personal, lyrical stream of consciousness of the camera eye follows a narrative section, the reader experiences a satisfying release of energy.

In the biographies and prose poems, the poetic diction creates an even more concentrated effect than the narrative. The author allows free rein to his feelings about the biographical persons and what they represent to him, but the compactness of his language adds to the emotional and intellectual meaning of them. For example, the Randolph Bourne biography concludes after Bourne's death with a vivid recollection of the man and his most famous statement:

> If any man has a ghost
> Bourne has a ghost,
> a tiny twisted unscared ghost in a black cloak
> hopping along the grimy old brick and brownstone streets still left in downtown New York,
> crying out in a shrill soundless giggle:
> War is the health of the state.[58]

Regardless of Dos Passos' personal feelings, however, he never reduces the biographical figures or what they symbolize for him to an improbable extent. Even the biographies of Hearst, Morgan, and Wilson present believable figures; the reader recognizes the author's bias, but he does not accuse him of oversimplifying his material.

Critics are virtually unanimous in agreeing that the intensely vigorous style of U. S. A. derives from Dos Passos' emotional involvement in his material. He personally took part in many of the actions described in U. S. A. and knew some of the biographical characters. Much of the material of the camera eyes is frankly autobiographical, particularly those portions which describe the youth and family of the camera eye in Europe. Dos Passos believes completely in the ideas he communicates and shares as a character in the theme. The intensity that results keeps the reader's interest at a high level throughout the trilogy and lifts the work from the oppressiveness of determinism.

NOTES

CHAPTER II

[1]Dos Passos, "A Note on Fitzgerald," The Crack-Up, p. 338.

[2]Willard Thorp, American Writing in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge, 1960), p. 131.

[3]Dos Passos, The Big Money, p. 437. The U. S. A. trilogy is not paged consecutively.

[4]Ibid., p. 462.

[5]Ibid., p. 464.

[6]John W. Aldridge, After the Lost Generation (New York, 1951), p. 72.

[7]This is standard criticism of U. S. A. Compare Robert E. Spiller et al., Literary History of the United States, pp. 1303-1304, and Robert H. Footman, "John Dos Passos," Sewanee Review, v. 47 (July-September, 1939), pp. 374-375.

[8]These terms are used throughout to refer to the characters. "Primary" designates those characters whose narratives are listed in the tables of content and who are, of course, principal to the work. "Secondary" applies to those characters who have a definite significance in relation to the theme, regardless of the extent of their treatment.

[9]Dos Passos, The Big Money, p. 491.

[10]Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel, p. 177.

[11]Ibid., p. 193.

[12]Aldridge, After the Lost Generation, p. 74.

[13]Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel, p. 282.

[14]Ibid., p. 175.

[15]Ibid., p. 247.

[16]Obesity as a symbol for moral or ethical deterioration occurs throughout Dos Passos' novels.

[17]Dos Passos, The Big Money, p. 481.

[18]Ibid., p. 512.

[19]Ibid., pp. 223-224.

[20]Ibid., p. 310.

[21]Ibid., p. 376.

[22]Ibid., p. 441.

[23]Ibid., p. 447.

[24]Dos Passos, 1919, p. 435.

[25]Dos Passos, The Big Money, p. 539.

[26]Ibid., p. 540.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid., p. 146.

[30]Ibid., p. 458.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid., p. 549.

[33]Ibid., p. 553.

[34]Dos Passos, 1919, p. 82.

[35]Ibid., p. 83.

[36]Ibid., p. 86.

[37]Ibid., p. 96.

[38]Ibid., pp. 210-211.

[39]Ibid., p. 211.

[40]Ibid., p. 213.

[41]Ibid., p. 375.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid., p. 396.

[44]Ibid., p. 397.

[45]Ibid., p. 462.

[46]Dos Passos, The Big Money, pp. 477-478.

[47]Ibid., p. 482.

[48]Ibid., p. 483.

[49]Ibid., p. 508.

[50]Ibid., p. 519.

[51]John Wrenn, John Dos Passos, p. 130.

[52]Ibid., p. 129. This is Wrenn's statement of the theme in Manhattan Transfer.

[53]Again this is standard criticism of U. S. A. Compare Footman, "John Dos Passos," p. 381.

[54]Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel, p. 80.

[55]Dos Passos, 1919, p. 100.

[56]Dos Passos, The Big Money, p. 464. Compare the following newsreels as equally representative: The 42nd Parallel--III, VII, XVII; 1919--XX, XXI, XXVI, XXXII, XXXVII; The Big Money--XLIV, LIV, LXVIII.

[57]Ibid.

[58]Dos Passos, 1919, pp. 105-106.

CHAPTER III

POST-WAR IDEOLOGY

> 'But I thought you were a liberal,' she kept saying almost tearfully, 'and now you have turned reactionary.'[1]

The philosophical conservatism that guided Dos Passos before the war has continued as his basic ideology up to and including Midcentury in 1961. Many critics, however, maintain that World War II marks a dichotomy in Dos Passos' thought which opposes contradictory ideological positions. These critics point to such evidence as Dos Passos' post-war publications in magazines like The National Review and his being honored with Senator Barry Goldwater and Senator Strom Thurmond by groups like the Young Americans for Freedom. But if one examines this critical opinion closely, he discovers that most of these critics fail to give clear definitions of their terminology and thus fall prey to the easy generalization that Dos Passos' ideology has changed because he now describes himself as a "conservative." The terms "liberal" and "conservative"--always elusive terms at best--can be highly ambiguous when applied to someone in contemporary America. The fact is that these terms during the last thirty years have changed meanings along with the change in their historical context. Dos Passos is fully aware of this change, as he makes clear in a little-known preface he wrote for William Buckley's Up From Liberalism in 1959:

> It is immensely heartening to us who would rather establish a true picture of the world we live in than one which is socially acceptable, to know that rash innovators are heartily at work. Thirty years ago the innovators called themselves radicals. Now mostly they call themselves conservatives.[2]

Following the publication of Midcentury, three men have discussed Dos Passos' ideology with considerable insight. Richard Horchler, writing in Commonweal in 1961, claims that there is "no reason to believe that Dos Passos has changed his outlook in any fundamental way."[3] In describing Dos Passos' movement toward the type of conservatism represented by William Buckley and The National Review, Horchler states that "it seems clear that this movement has resulted not from changes in ideological conviction ... but from shifts in the nation's political power structure."[4] Horchler, however, claims that Dos Passos has never had a completely formulated ideology.[5] Daniel Aaron, writing in Harper's in 1962, agrees that Dos Passos has not changed ideologically. Aaron condemns him for the lack of "imaginative conviction" in his post-war writing by saying "the words may be the same but not the music."[6] David Sanders, writing in the South Atlantic Review in the winter of 1961, traces a consistent "anarchism" through all of Dos Passos' work and calls this anarchism "the direct antecedent of his present day conservatism...."[7] Sanders concludes that Dos Passos' thought is "remarkably continuous.... Dos Passos, as a conservative in the sixties, is little less an 'anarchist' than he was in Spain forty years ago."[8]

These three commentators understand the constancy of Dos Passos' ideological position, but all three fail to carry their discussions far enough. Horchler's criticism is ambiguous when he denies that Dos Passos has ever formulated an ideology while maintaining that his "outlook" has

remained the same. Aaron concentrates so heavily on the post-war fiction that he devotes too little explanation to ideology. And Sanders introduces the inadequate term "anarchism," a term which implies the absence of positive ideological beliefs. The merit of these criticisms cannot be overlooked, but it is obvious that more explanation of ideological consistency is needed. Much can be gained initially by defining the terms "liberal" and "conservative" according to Dos Passos' use of them. One should bear in mind a complaint that Dos Passos made in 1950:

> The very words we need to use to describe what we see change their meanings. Slogans and phrases that yesterday pointed steadily toward the lodestar of good today spin waveringly round the compass and tomorrow may have taken on meanings opposite from the meanings they started with.[9]

The term "liberal" before the Second World War was applied generally to diverse groups which opposed monopoly capitalism. Among the oppositionists were such otherwise irreconcilable factions as Communists, socialists, anarchists, "Wobblys," and others. Dos Passos shared in this opposition, and his writing and political actions caused him to be named a liberal. But the too often overlooked qualification of this designation is the fact that Dos Passos' opposition was based on already established beliefs.[10] He was aligned with the liberals because their dominant cause coincided with his; he believed that the majority in all of these groups was "conscious of the fact that we were trying to conserve the independence of the average citizen...."[11] All of these liberals denounced the power of capitalism because they believed "organized money" thwarted the average citizen's opportunities:

> This was the underlying theme of the Populist agitation, of the Progressive and Socialist and Farmer-Labor parties. Through the referendum and recall and primary elections and labor unions and cooperatives we thought that something like the old town-

> meeting type of self government could be revived. The aim of all the diverse radical movements .., was somehow to restore the dignity of the men who did the work. Staid Single-Taxers, direct action IWWs and bombthrowing anarchists had the same eventual goal.[12]

Between 1932 and 1936 there seemed to be a movement in the proper direction. Dos Passos was enthusiastic when Franklin Roosevelt's "mild revolution" stripped laissez faire autonomy from the capitalists. Roosevelt's administration quickly incorporated many of the "liberal" tenets and appropriated liberal phraseology as its own.[13] The term soon became descriptive of one who favored Roosevelt's administration and, according to Dos Passos, a synonym for great federal power. The disenchantment Dos Passos experienced with Roosevelt during the Spanish Civil War turned to despair as the Federal government concentrated more and more powers; and Roosevelt's election to a third and fourth term caused Dos Passos to fear a dictatorship. As Granville Hicks has indicated, nothing is "deeper" in Dos Passos "than his fear of power;"[14] and it is precisely this fear that caused his subsequent bitter denunciation of Roosevelt.

Dos Passos maintains that the failure of business in 1929 was followed by the establishment of a "new bureaucracy" under Roosevelt. This large and complex bureaucracy, still in existence, wields as much if not more power over the individual than capitalism had in the twenties:

> The First World War had enormously increased the power of the Federal government. Under Roosevelt the labor union bureaucracies took their place beside the bureaucracies of the great corporations as economically dominant forces. Then the Second World War left government towering over both.[15]

In an article for Life magazine published in 1948, Dos Passos accuses the socialist-oriented government bureaucracy of being overly concerned

with perpetuating itself. Once the power has been achieved, Dos Passos argues, those in power wish first of all to secure their power. Government bureaucracy causes "a loss of concern for individual liberty" because it fails to "keep the avenues open for the freedom and growth of the individual man...."[16] He concludes the article by claiming that "Socialism is not the answer to the too great concentration of power that is the curse of capitalism."[17] Eight years later in The Theme Is Freedom Dos Passos describes the relationship of the "oldtime" liberals to the new bureaucracy:

> When some of us, still applying the standards we had learned in trying to defend Sacco and Vanzetti and the Harlan miners, the Spanish republicans and a hundred other less publicized victims of oppression of one sort or another, started looking ... at the new institutions, we got a good shellacking from the defenders of the established order for our pains. The businessman, who used to defend himself with such fury, was now fair game, but you criticized a socialized institution at your own risk.
>
> If some of us, who had seen the Abominable Snowmen, pointed out that the Communist Party was a greater danger to individual liberty than all the old power mad bankers and industrialists from hell to breakfast, we were promptly written down in the bad book as reactionaries.[18]

Thus shortly after the end of the war the term "liberal" had lost most of its former meaning. Where it once meant opposition to entrenched power, it now meant support of the entrenched power of federal bureaucracy; nothing had changed, from Dos Passos' view, except the agency of power. It follows that those commentators who perceive that Dos Passos no longer fits the term "liberal" fail to appreciate the fact that the term no longer fits Dos Passos.

For one to grasp fully the constancy of Dos Passos' ideology, he must

refer to the beliefs of the philosophical conservative as they are outlined in Chapter I. The salient points of this ideology can be summarized as opposition to any highly organized power structure; reliance on the past to determine action in the present; an acceptance of practical politics; and a consideration of man which realizes his limitations without disregarding his spiritual nature. The first of these points has been treated thus far by showing Dos Passos' opposition to the postwar increase in federal power.[19] The remaining three require further attention.

The philosophical conservative constantly refers to the past to determine his present; the past serves as a framework for guidance, and history records the extent to which man is faithful to his past. Dos Passos' reliance on history was made clear as early as 1927 in his claim that "history is always more alive ... than fiction" because good history provides "some sort of standard to measure ourselves by...."[20] In his use of the past, Dos Passos interprets traditional democracy as the "self-governing tradition" intended by America's founders. This tradition--idealized in U. S. A. and the following novels--assumes for Dos Passos a significance comparable to a religious belief. His own works of history--particularly The Head and Heart of Thomas Jefferson (1954) and Prospects of a Golden Age (1959)--are biographical studies of the makers of the tradition to which Dos Passos completely dedicates himself. Whether these histories are entirely accurate is irrelevant here; the important point is that Dos Passos is firmly committed to his interpretations:

> If what we aim to do is to work toward increasing the happiness and dignity of every man, just because he is a man, that is what the founders of this country wanted too; in their lives and writings is a great storehouse of practical information on how to go about it.[21]

Dos Passos has no doubt that his concern for "defending every man's freedom against domination by other men"[22] is the same concern that motivated the "founders of this country." Americans have as their heritage the "habits and traditions and skills of selfgovernment"[23] with which to build their present; and if they rely as heavily upon this heritage as they should,"that cantilever bridge into the future that we call hope [will have] a firm foundation in what has been."[24]

In The Theme Is Freedom, Dos Passos recalls that after the collapse of the Spanish republic he became "consumed with curiosity to know what the phraseology of democracy ... meant in terms of people's lives."[25] He succeeded in putting in objective terms what he had accepted earlier as the "basic reason for the existence of the United States,"[26] and lamented, as he had done in the past, the crimes and failures of the nation. His study of history caused no significant change in his interpretation of the past, but it did give him renewed faith in democracy as "a process, ... a means, not an end."[27]

Dos Passos' continual reference to the "founders of this country" has been instrumental in causing his alignment with the contemporary Republican Party. As Rossiter points out, the philosophical conservative recognizes the practical necessity of working with an established group; and for Dos Passos in the sixties the most functional group is represented by Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona. One must not assume,

however, that Dos Passos accepts Goldwater's type of Republicanism without severe qualifications. Goldwater's beliefs as stated in The Conscience of a Conservative regarding militarism, income taxation, and property are among those objections Dos Passos has to him.[28] The republican figure who most closely represents Dos Passos' views is the late Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio.[29] Taft's position as leader of the "right-of-center" elements of the Republican Party has been filled by Goldwater, who has undoubtedly pushed the position further to the "right." But Dos Passos believes the incumbent bureaucracy consists of "the ideological camouflage of the will to power"[30] and for practical reasons gives political support to the man who represents "the leadership for the direction ... the United States must take at the moment."[31]

Thus Dos Passos' support of Goldwater is a practical necessity because such support seems the best means of reversing the trend toward more concentration of federal power. John Wrenn explains that this support does not imply an over-emphasis on the means: "Quite the reverse is true; the means are what must be done now to swing the ever-shifting balance of institutionalizing forces back into an equilibrium in which the individual can make his way."[32] Politics becomes the lever with which society is shifted, important in itself in so far as it is useful in the movement toward more self-government.

The most serious error possible in interpreting Dos Passos' utilization of contemporary conservatism is to equate him with the "far right" extremists who are represented by the John Birch Society and the "minutemen." He is consistently opposed to all extremes: he opposed Huey Long in the thirties,[33] and he opposes the Birch society

in the sixties. Joseph Freeman, a friend of long standing and an associate of Dos Passos on the editorial board of The New Masses in the twenties, helps clarify Dos Passos' position:

> Dos Passos ... really does care about justice and freedom. I've heard those Birchers say proudly they've copied the tactics of the Communists. Dos would die at a thing like that [;] those were the things that disgusted him.[34]

It must be made clear that Dos Passos' support of Goldwater is based on the conviction that Goldwater at the present time represents the needs of the United States more than any other national figure. Dos Passos calls himself a "Barry Goldwater Republican" because no other spokesman at present more effectively opposes the incumbent bureaucracy. His alignment with this element of the Republican Party does not temper his own ideology. Philosophical conservatism is above party influences even though it uses party influence to work toward its own ends. Dos Passos' eulogy of Carla Tresca illustrates the author's awareness of the non-partisan supremacy of philosophical conservatism: "During the last ten years, in his last great fight against the fascists and communists, he became in the best sense of the word a conservative."[35]

Thus, with his opposition to power made practical by work through an organized party, the philosophical conservative hopes to resurrect the selfgoverning democracy of the past. In his use of a particular party, however, he is extremely conscious of its own potential for power. Dos Passos understands that it is never safe "to do evil that good may come of it" because the "good gets lost and the evil goes on."[36] The danger involved in his alignment with the right-of-center conservatives is fully apparent to Dos Passos, but the positive beliefs of his phil-

osophical conservatism safely dictate how much of his allegiance he can afford to give.

Dos Passos' ideology is closest to contemporary conservatism when he comments on the nature of man. William Buckley and Barry Goldwater agree with Dos Passos that man's spiritual needs cannot be divorced from his physical wants. In addition Dos Passos maintains that morality must be instilled in man and that man, regardless of his potential, is inherently weak. All three men agree that contemporary "liberalism" fails largely because it ignores these aspects of man's nature.

Dos Passos' association with Buckley began in 1952 when the latter became a member of the "Artists and Writers for Taft Committee" that Dos Passos headed. Four years later Dos Passos published his first article in Buckley's National Review, and in 1959 he wrote a preface to Buckley's Up From Liberalism. Buckley contends in this book that contemporary liberalism has no set program because logical positivism is its philosophy. Thus the scientific method dictates what is real with the result that "method logically directs all intellectual (to which we subordinate moral and metaphysical) traffic."[37] Goldwater agrees with Buckley as he goes more directly to the point:

> The root difference between Conservatives and the Liberals of today is that Conservatives take account of the whole man, while the Liberals tend to look only at the material side of man's nature.[38]

Dos Passos' characters--from John Andrews, through Ben Compton and Blackie Bowman--echo his constant belief that destruction of the spirit is worse than destruction of the flesh. Outside of his fiction, Dos Passos reiterates this idea. In The Theme Is Freedom,

he claims that "No man ever has been broken by overwork. It is frustration, disillusionment and despair that shatters a man's will to live."[39]

Society, according to Dos Passos, should contain a strong moral foundation, not only because Christian morality is a part of America's heritage but because "Freedom without morals is a negative thing."[40] He believes that a society based on morality and "a solid scheme of ethics" is "the most practical thing in the world"[41] because men will always "behave as they have been brought up to behave."[42] Like Edmund Burke, Dos Passos considers "that man is by his constitution a religious animal;"[43] and in Midcentury he affirms "that still small voice that is God's spark in man."[44]

Society's function of "moral conditioning" is necessary, Dos Passos maintains, because of "the evil inherent in mankind."[45] Men who are in positions of power are particularly susceptible to corruption because "No man is good enough to wield it."[46] His consideration of Wilson in U. S. A. and Roosevelt in The Grand Design reflects this belief, but his most succinct expression occurs in The Theme Is Freedom:

> The crimes and errors which have endangered our future as a nation, and the future of everything we hold worthwhile in civilization, have been committed by our leaders when, blinded by the self-righteousness which is the curse of power, they have consented to acts and committed acts against helpless peoples which would have been repugnant to any ordinary moderately moral man.[47]

Thus Dos Passos' consideration of man, although amplified in his more detailed explication of his beliefs after the war, has remained basically the same. It should now be apparent that his philosophical conservatism as a whole has been constant throughout his career. What changes have occurred have been a matter of temperament and not of idea. For example,

the oppressive pessimism of U. S. A. has been supplanted by a deeper faith in the possibilities of the United States; yet this faith does not carry over into his post-war fiction with sufficient conviction. In 1955 he described his hopes for America to a group of German students:

> /Americans/ were just beginning, amid crimes, illusions, mistakes and false starts, to get to work on how to spread out what people needed much more: the sense of belonging, the faith in human dignity, the confidence of each man in the greatness of his own soul without which life is a meaningless servitude. I told them to admire our failures because they might contain the seeds of great victories to come...,[48]

Over a period of forty years Dos Passos has remained true to his deeply felt beliefs about America. He has produced a staggering amount of work in a concentrated effort to communicate his beliefs. It is unfortunate indeed that a writer of his stature and ability, who has approached the social turbulence of his lifetime with "dignity and seriousness" and who has, in addition, dedicated his productivity to a constant and positive ideology, has not been able to maintain a consistent quality in his art. The novels Dos Passos has published since 1945 are weak, some of them embarrassingly ineffectual. One cannot ignore these novels, for they represent almost half of his career. But one can approach them more honestly and more objectively by discarding the confusing myth of his ideological vacillation.

NOTES

CHAPTER III

[1]Dos Passos, "The Failure of Marxism," quoted in Dos Passos, The Theme is Freedom, p. 237. Dos Passos here satirizes the typical "wall of incomprehension" of those who misunderstand his ideology.

[2]Dos Passos, "Foreward" to William F. Buckley, Up From Liberalism, p. vii.

[3]Richard Horchler, "Prophet Without Hope," Commonweal, September 29, 1961, p. 16.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Daniel Aaron, "The Riddle of John Dos Passos," Harper's Magazine March, 1962, p. 60.

[7]David Sanders, "The 'Anarchism' of John Dos Passos," South Atlantic Review, X (Winter, 1961), p. 45.

[8]Ibid., p. 55.

[9] Dos Passos, The Theme is Freedom, p. 249.

[10]Compare Chapter I, pp. 6-7.

[11]Dos Passos, "Foreward" to William F. Buckley, Up From Liberalism, p. vii.

[12]Ibid., pp. vii-viii.

[13]Compare William F. Buckley, Up From Liberalism, p. 116. With a maximum of pomposity, Buckley asks the following as a rhetorical question: "Is not the whole of the Liberal ideology agglutinated by semantical raids on substantive ideals?"

[14]Granville Hicks, "The Politics of John Dos Passos," p. 95.

[15]Dos Passos, "Foreward" to William F. Buckley, Up From Liberalism, pp. ix-x.

[16]Dos Passos, "The Failure of Marxism," Life, January 19, 1948, p. 108.

[17]Ibid. It is on these grounds that Dos Passos repudiates his earlier flirtation with socialism. This does not, however, constitute a reversal in ideology. Compare The Theme is Freedom, p. 238. Dos Passos points out that "from the point of view of the well-being of men and women the contradiction is not between 'capitalism' and 'socialism' but between the sort of organization that stimulates growth and the sort that fastens on society the dead hand of bureaucratic routine or the suckers of sterile vested interests...."

[18]Dos Passos, The Theme is Freedom, p. 236.

[19]Equally revealing are the power forces opposed in the novels. Between Three Soldiers and Midcentury, Dos Passos opposes the military, the city, Capitalism, Communism, Fascism, the New Deal bureaucracy, and organized labor. Dos Passos' point is that all complex organizations are basically the same.

[20]Dos Passos, quoted in John Wrenn, John Dos Passos, pp. 149-150.

[21]Dos Passos, The Theme is Freedom, p. 160.

[22]Dos Passos, "The Failure of Marxism," p. 98.

[23]Dos Passos, quoted in The Theme is Freedom, p. 155.

[24]Ibid., p. 156.

[25]Ibid., p. 152.

[26]Ibid., p. 257.

[27]Wrenn, John Dos Passos, pp. 178-179. Wrenn explains Dos Passos' tolerance for Communism, McCarthy, and Goldwater with this phrase. It is interesting to note that Dos Passos' personal consideration of McCarthy--"loud-mouthed ... simple-minded demagogue" (Midcentury, p. 361)--did not influence his decision to support him. In other words, Dos Passos took McCarthy's urge for power into account and determined that at the moment McCarthy was worth the risk involved. Goldwater, however, showed no consideration of McCarthy as a danger to civil liberties and backed him consistently with nation-wide speeches and even voted for him when the Senate majority voted censure.

[28]Barry Goldwater, The Conscience of a Conservative (Shepherdsville, Kentucky, 1960). Goldwater, for example, urges that NATO and SEATO become offensive rather than defensive organizations (pp. 94-97); and he opposes both atomic test bans and conventional disarmament (pp. 112-113). His internal policy ideas are equally extreme. He opposes any graduation in income taxation (pp. 63-64); and claims that rights of property are "moral" as well as legal rights. He expects Federal intervention when individual property rights are violated--as in the case of nationalized property in Cuba--but maintains that the government otherwise should allow total independence to property owners.

[29]Aaron, "The Riddle of John Dos Passos," p. 60.

[30]Dos Passos, "Foreward" to William F. Buckley, Up From Liberalism, p. xi.

[31]Wrenn, John Dos Passos, p. 149.

[32]Ibid., p. 179. The misinterpretation of Dos Passos' use of the "means" has caused much confusion about his ideological position. In the twenties and thirties, he was considered a spokesman for the Communist Party because it misinterpreted its claim on him. In the sixties, the same type of misinterpretation by "right-wing" groups is taking place. Perhaps Dos Passos has always loaned his name and prestige without sufficient consideration of the possible consequences, but his use of the "means" explains his actions.

[33]Dos Passos, quoted in The Theme is Freedom, p. 155. Dos Passos considered Huey Long a dangerous aspirant for dictatorship.

[34]Joseph Freeman, quoted in Dan Wakefield, "Dos, Which Side Are You On?", p. 116.

[35]Dos Passos, quoted in The Theme is Freedom, p. 177, (Italics mine).

[36]Dos Passos, "The Failure of Marxism," p. 105.

[37]Buckley, Up From Liberalism, p. 114.

[38]Goldwater, The Conscience of a Conservative, p. 10.

[39]Dos Passos, quoted in The Theme is Freedom, p. 195.

[40]Ibid., p. 260.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid., p. 158.

[43]Edmund Burke, "Conservatism," Pro and Con, ed. by Myron Matlaw and James B. Stronks (Boston, 1960), p. 313.

[44]Dos Passos, Midcentury (Boston, 1961), p. 421.

[45]Dos Passos, quoted in The Theme is Freedom, p. 262.

[46]Ibid., p. 162.

[47]Ibid., p. 260.

[48]Ibid., p. 262.

CHAPTER IV

THE POST-WAR NOVELS

> The cool detachment of a writer
> is hard to keep in middle age.[1]

In "The Duty of a Writer," an address delivered in London in September, 1941, Dos Passos claimed that the writer's function is to tell the "average man the kind of society he lives in."[2] The point of the whole address was that "in times of emergency the writer's duty was to write and act first as a citizen and only secondarily, if at all, as an artist."[3] He called to mind that "Milton put off Paradise Lost to slave for the Commonwealth,"[4] and urged that his contemporaries in England and America do the same. During the next four years, Dos Passos did work "for the commonwealth." He reported the war effort on the home front and in the Pacific. He published The Ground We Stand On (a study of Anglo-American tradition) and State of the Nation. During 1945, he reported the Nürnburg trials from Germany. But after the war was over, Dos Passos did not return to a more traditional point of view regarding literature. Instead he wrote as if the United States were still involved in a national emergency which required "the integrated effort of /the artist's/ whole heart and whole intelligence."[5] He published five novels between 1945 and 1960, not one of which can be considered durable literature. In short, Dos Passos' concern for interpreting society

for the "average man" continued after the war and caused his novels to lose their appeal for a more discerning audience.

Dos Passos had no established theory of writing prior to the Second World War. He was concerned with social criticism, inventive techniques, the relationship of poetry to prose, and interpretative history. He had a definite ideology which permeated his fiction, but he never reduced his material to a didactic level. In U. S. A., for example, Dos Passos attacks monopoly capitalism with few reservations; but he maintains sufficient "aesthetic distance" from his material to create an illusion of objectivity--or "edge of skepticism and irony."[6] This objectivity is essential to the aesthetic success of U. S. A. But in his post-war novels, Dos Passos dispenses with any pretense of objectivity as he anxiously and pointedly tells the average reader what is wrong with American society.

Forfeiture of objectivity has had a disastrous effect on four of Dos Passos' post-war novels. Although these novels still champion the "under-dog" and advocate philosophical conservatism, they fall far beneath a reasonable standard of excellence. Not one of the post-war novels compares favorably with U. S. A. in intellectual content, emotional expressiveness, or simple human interest. In fact, only Chosen Country approaches the level of Three Soldiers and Manhattan Transfer, while Most Likely to Succeed and The Great Days are inferior to even Dos Passos' weak beginning novel, One Man's Initiation. Criticism of these novels has been justifiably harsh. Richard Chase, for example, accuses Dos Passos of becoming a "pamphleteer" in his later work because he has forgone "the requirements of good fiction in order to contrive his fables for didactic

purposes."[7] Maxwell Geismar states bluntly that "we should shut our eyes" to the later work.[8] However, Dos Passos' post-war novels constitute almost one-third of his production as a novelist; regardless of their lack of literary merit, they cannot be ignored. The purposes of this chapter, therefore, are to discuss the post-war novels in relation to their literary merit and to state reasons, as far as possible, for their failure. The novels will be dealt with in chronological order. Following this review, structure and style will be discussed.

The Grand Design (1949) is generally considered the third volume of a trilogy called either District of Columbia or "The Spotswood Trilogy." The other two novels, Adventures of a Young Man and Number One, actually have such little relationship with The Grand Design that they are best considered separately.[9] Ostensibly The Grand Design tells the story of the "well-intentioned men" who answer Franklin Roosevelt's request for competent laymen in his 1932 inaugural address. These men offer their services to the New Deal administration in the naive expectation of aiding their country in the depression. But the major purpose of The Grand Design is to attack the New Deal and President Roosevelt. Dos Passos regards Roosevelt as a threat to democracy; Roosevelt's "disease of power" causes him to disregard tradition and even contemplate a dictatorship. In opposition to the Machiavelian Roosevelt, Dos Passos poses the economic concept of "the family-size farm" as envisioned by Paul Graves and Millard O. Carroll. Thematically, The Grand Design is another statement of Dos Passos' insistence that power corrupts.[10]

The Grand Design begins with Roosevelt's inauguration in 1932 and concludes after the United States has entered the Second World War.

Millard Carroll leaves a flourishing Texas business to work for the Department of Agriculture under Secretary Walker Watson. In Washington, Carroll employs Paul Graves (a boyhood friend of Glenn Spotswood in Adventures of a Young Man). The disillusionment and final futility of Carroll and Graves comprise the most important thread of the plot. Graves represents a man of the soil in Jeffersonian terms. His supposedly independent musings explicitly state the theme:

> Your relationship with people changes when you try to organize them into doing things. You have to kind of lower their consequence. First thing you know it's your career instead of the work gets to be the important thing.[11]

Graves complains often of the "gap between the plans of the policy level and the poor devil in the field being moved around by forces too big for him to understand";[12] he loses his faith in the New Deal as he carefully works out his Jeffersonian ideas:

> ... it was the basic structure of people's lives that counted, the houses they lived in, the way they made their living. It was their daily control over their destinies that counted. The oldtime American farmer had lived a hard life fighting weather and prices but he was the master of his destiny. It was that feeling of being master of your destiny that was frittered away in largescale organizations, in city life, in industrial plants and labor unions. If you could make a man a little more independent at the source of his livelihood he would be able to make over all these organizations into organs for selfgovernment instead of organs for slavery.[13]

It is clear from the beginning, however, that Graves is only a mouthpiece for the author. His ideas of personal independence, although valid in themselves, are merely rephrasings of Dos Passos' personal comments in his non-fiction.[14] More significantly, Graves' dream of family-size farms with "two bedrooms, bathroom, livingroom, kitchen with a good enamelled sink and an electric stove and a washing machine and a cement walk ... and a simple dairy for cooling milk"[15] is, a reader feels, a reductio ad

absurdum. Likewise, Graves' encounters with union organizers are absurd. When Graves meets Joe Wilks in a rural cafe, the organizer immediately launches into the story of his life. Once Wilks had left the union movement through fear of personal injury, but he now is an affluent man because "the Great WhiteFather /Roosevelt/ spoke an' said, 'Let there be unions,' an' there was unions an' a good paying job for anythin' that looked like an organizer."[16] Such propagandizing destroys credibility; the situation and character are obviously manipulated for the author's didactic purpose. Even more improbable than Joe Wilks are the Communists in The Grand Design. They are engaged in "espionage and counterespionage and countercounter espionage"[17] and "all they know how to do is shoot everybody they can lay their hands on."[18] Dos Passos exaggerates his portraits out of all proportion to probability. Dr. Jane Sparling, a Communist "agent," wears "mannishly tailored" suits and is obviously a lesbian. She attempts to pry information from Paul Graves' secretary, but with little success.[19] Winthrop Strang, a young homosexual, is used by Sparling to raise money for party enterprises. His characterization is so improbable that it becomes ludicrous. He fears blackmail from his roommate who has left him:

> My, Mother would squall. He /the roommate/ didn't care about Mother, it was all her fault anyway for starting his Oedipus complex, she was so selfish ... But oh God jail. They sent people to jail. It was the horrible decadent society he was brought up in. Won't be long before the comrades make a clean sweep of it.... A boy could go to work then with other young workers in the harvestfields, in an automobile plant, go to sea on a freighter and come back tough as any of them muscled and regular .., a Party Member ... then a guy would belong. His fingers were crinkling like prunes.[20]

Scores of other characters--many of them caricatures of actual New Deal political figures--seem packed into the novel. They meet at parties, exchange names and snatches of dialogue, and float vaporously away. Most

of them, however, have some relationship to Walker Watson, a vacillating puppet of Roosevelt whose aspirations for higher office are twice squelched by the "Mogul."[21] Walker is a "jumbled composite of Henry Wallace and Harry Hopkins."[22] As Secretary of Agriculture, he hopes to be Roosevelt's vice-presidential choice in 1940. Later he aspires to the position of coördinator of the War Procurement Board. On both occasions, Roosevelt selects other men for the positions. Walker finally rebels and claims he will "expose" Roosevelt;[23] but after he meets with the President, Walker is "the Administration zombie all over again."[24]

Roosevelt is shown throughout the novel as a devious and clever manipulator of men who takes pleasure from shuffling their destinies. His decision to run for a third term surprises his supporters and disillusions Carroll and Graves. Dos Passos describes the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, where Roosevelt accepts the nomination for a third term, as a predetermined fiasco. The mayor of Chicago has hired gangsters organized to control the convention. One of the mayor's hired men explains the "spontaneous demonstration" that has persuaded Roosevelt to accept the nomination:

> 'How did yer like de spontaneous demonstration Mr. Carroll?' he started as soon as Millard stuck his head out of the bathroom door. 'Chimmy, he calls de boys together an' he says boys de mayor says dis gotto be de biggest spontaneous demonstration ever was. Chi's de convention city an' we gotto make it stick ... It was Chimmy's idear. Boys he says if you don't lift dat Stadium roof ten feet off its hinges it's no dice' ... 'So dey rigged up some highpowered mikes for de guys down in de basement. Dey had claxons an' cowbells an' every goddam ting. De girlfrien' she told me it sounded real natural. She was tuned in all night.[25]

The story of Herbert Spotswood forms a sub-plot in The Grand Design. His sons Glenn and Tyler were made political martyrs in Adventures of a

Young Man and Number One--Glenn by the Communists in Spain and Tyler by an American political demagogue. Herbert Spotswood illustrates once again how a man of good convictions can be manipulated by the Communists. He returns from a League of Nations assignment in Geneva to warn the American public of Hitler's military designs. As a radio news analyist, Spotswood becomes influential in molding public opinion. But Spotswood is susceptible to flattery and persuasion. When Dr. Sparling and other Communists ask him to speak before a memorial meeting of Spanish Civil War heroes, Spotswood accepts without investigating the situation. Tyler telephones to warn him that the meeting is actually a Communist rally, but Spotswood refuses to listen. When his prepared speech angers the audience, Spotswood becomes so flustered that he begins shouting Communist slogans.[26]

Spotswood, Sparling, Strang, and Wilks are weakly drawn, improbable characters. Even Watson, Carroll, and Graves are unconvincing in their positions as central characters. In fact, all of the characters in The Grand Design lack the development necessary to make them seem real. Even if the characters were more artistically drawn, however, it is doubtful if The Grand Design would be a successful novel. Too many plot incidents are improbable and, worst of all, the ideas are not convincing. The Grand Design is actually an over-simplified "lecture" on economics and politics in which the author implies that an agrarian utopia is forfeited by Roosevelt. The reader grants that Paul Graves' plan for family-size farms might have appeared feasible in the thirties; but with the perspective gained by the passage of time, the reader knows that such a concept is ridiculous: Roosevelt certainly cannot be blamed for the urbanization

of the United States. The reader inevitably recognizes that Dos Passos has over-simplified politics and economics in order to condemn Roosevelt and the New Deal, and the family-size farm concept is only a "straw man" argument. When the reader puts the novel aside, he cannot help mourning along with Maxwell Geismar that "Dos Passos' view of life has become so petty."[27]

Chosen Country (1951) is something of an anomaly in Dos Passos' post-war fiction. By far the best of the five novels, Chosen Country repeats much of U. S. A. and offers an alternative to the pessimism of the trilogy. The time covered is the first third of the twentieth century, but "biographies" connect the nineteenth century with the social turmoil of the First World War and its aftermath. Characters reminiscent of Mary French, Ben Compton, J. Ward Moorehouse, Don Stevens and others are peripheral to the story of Jay Pignatelli, the semi-autobiographical "hero" of Chosen Country. Pignatelli is the bastard son of a successful second generation Italian lawyer. He grows up in Europe and America, studies at Harvard, serves in the ambulance corps during the war and The Near East Relief afterwards. When he receives his law degree in the mid-twenties, Jay helps defend two Italian anarchists who are accused of murder. But after their conviction, Jay refuses to work on their appeal to a higher court. Instead, he marries a beautiful and intelligent girl and accepts a partnership in the law firm of a friend.

Thus in place of the alienation of the individual from his country that Dos Passos portrays in U. S. A., the author substitutes an affirmation of the individual. Jay accepts his country "right or wrong" in the belief that ultimately all will be well. Blanche Gelfant considers

Chosen Country a frank autobiography in which the author-hero is reconciled with his father, conciliated to his country, and adjusted to the success-goals of America.[28] Unlike the retrospective view of U. S. A., the "historical viewpoint of Chosen Country is prospective, looking towards a still malleable future in which the founding dreams can yet come true."[29]

The sympathetically imagined character of Jay Pignatelli is the chief merit of Chosen Country. As a child he is deeply affected by his parents and the alienation caused by his illegitimacy. Gradually Jay accepts his position as a bastard son and begins to respect his father. The elder Pignatelli loses his wealth and spends his declining years writing. One of his projects is a treatise on a model corporation in which every man "from the janitor to the chairman of the board of directors, will receive a just reward for his work."[30] Jay agrees with his father that "there is too much inequality in this country."[31] He accepts a personal responsibility for working toward social justice, and becomes associated with various degrees of radicals. But Jay is at no time a Communist or even socialist; he never goes beyond his simple belief that "the one thing a man can do ... is to try to tell people the truth."[32] When he is defending the two Italian anarchists, Jay encounters numerous extremists who attempt to persuade him to their points of view. He retains his independence, though he complains that "I find myself in the position of seeming to advocate a lot of things I don't want to advocate."[33]

Jay Pignatelli is reminiscent of the lonely youth in "The Camera Eye." Like this disenfranchised young man, Jay curses his loneliness. He feels that he is doomed to be a spectator and laments his "goddamned everlasting

life."[34] His movement from desire to acceptance, from aloneness to belonging, comes very near believable fiction. His involvement in the fictionalized Sacco and Vanzetti case and his association with Communists and socialists seem logical steps toward an affirmation of democratic traditions. But there are too many serious weaknesses in the novel. There are structural and stylistic weaknesses and too much repetition from other novels. Hugh Swanson is a thinly disguised repetition of J. Ward Moorehouse. But where Moorehouse is developed from birth and given probable motivations for his every action, Swanson is introduced as a middle-aged man. He is intended as a satirical comment on the advertising business. Like Moorehouse, he laments the false values of his business: "I want to go up to the rooftops and announce to the world in a loud voice that nothing matters but a few simple honest things."[35] Later in the same conversation, Swanson tells Lulie Harrington that he wants her ideas "as to how we can dramatize the Archer Roller Bearing. I want the women of the family to think of it as a beautiful roller bearing."[36] The contradiction between Swanson's two statements is excessive; the reader cannot fail to realize that Dos Passos has manipulated Swanson's character for a definite satirical end. Ezekiel Harrington, Lulie's father, is another improbable character with his pompous, ridiculous dialogue. When Lulie meets him at the lake and offers to carry his bags to the cabin, he refuses in such stilted language that he seems to be a fool:

> No little gentian. I shall walk slowly up to the cottage enjoying the sweet odors of balsam and fir and thinking of the many metamorphoses in our destiny since your dear mother and I first started to spend sylvan summers on the arm of this boreal lake.[37]

Chosen Country is the best of Dos Passos' post-war novels because it develops one central and believable character, yet it too is lacking in the requirements of good fiction that distinguish U. S. A. Jay's affirmation of the "rightness" of his country is finally unconvincing. The novel ends with his marriage to Lulie Harrington. They stand in the doorway of a cabin in the North woods, thinking of themselves as American pioneers as they look out at the ocean:

> The waves breathed in the cove. 'Husband,' she said. 'Wife,' he said. The words made them bashful. They clung together against their bashfulness. 'Today we begin, he said 'to make ...' 'This wilderness our home,' she said. The risen sun over the ocean shone in their faces.[38]

Such a melodramatic conclusion, aimed as it is directly toward the average reader, is patently unreal. Harrison Smith, reviewing Chosen Country in the Saturday Review of Literature, is justified in calling this final episode "as slick and as artificially embroidered as a banal love story in a mass circulation magazine."[39]

After Chosen Country, Dos Passos turns his full attention to the problem of Communism in the United States. Most Likely to Succeed (1954) has been aptly described as "a tedious, squalid recital of a Hollywood writer's sell-out to Communism."[40] A diverse group of authors and other interested persons organize an experimental theatre in order to present "revolutionary" plays. When the group fails financially, the characters drift into the Hollywood movie industry. J. E. D. Morris, a friend of Jay's in Chosen Country, gradually becomes more and more deeply involved with Communists and is finally "duped" into joining the Party.

The single purpose of Most Likely to Succeed is to expose the "devious machinations" of Communists in the United States; every character and

incident is subordinate to this end. The novel fails because the characters and plot are so absurdly simplified that the reader is insulted. The characters who oppose the Communists are nothing more than superficial "boobs," while the Communists themselves seem "comic opera villains."[41] These characters resemble those in the "Steve Canyon" comic strip--anyone can distinguish between the "good guys" and the "bad guys" in this didactic lecture on Communist infiltration. Morris even feels "like a funnypaper character himself"[42] as he stumbles from one improbable incident to another. Harold Clurman, writing in The Nation, gives an excellent summation of the novel's lack of merit:

> 'Most Likely to Succeed' is a wretched piece of work. It achieves nothing.... It is merely libelous..., There is not a living character in the story ... its people are vermin and therefore hardly typical of anything.[43]

The characters in Most Likely to Succeed are the most weakly drawn of all Dos Passos' characters. Their names are even chosen to represent their positions. For example, Eli SOLITAIR is the one independent thinker in the novel, and Sam FAUST is the central villain. Morris is caught between Solitair and Faust as he searches for a feeling of "inner certainty." Each person he meets attempts to influence him in one direction or another, but Morris thinks of himself as a free agent until near the end. He brags about his "independence" as he moves from one Communist girl-friend to another. In turn he seduces or is seduced by the wife of a Russian general, a Scandinavian lady chiropractor, and a Mexican Communist teenager. His most durable affair is with Felicia Hardestie, his common law wife; but when Felicia leaves him, Morris begins living with Jane Marlowe. He had met Marlowe years earlier when returning from

Morocco. Morris claims that Marlowe is the only woman he has had deep affection for, and he offers to marry her. But Sam Faust discovers that Marlowe is actually an anti-Communist agent, and the Party forces Morris to give her up. The shock is too much for Morris; in the last line of the novel, his heart fails.

Not one character in Most Likely to Succeed resembles an actual person. Morris' naïveté is excessive. When he thinks about how much women love him, he feels "a warm sweet almost tearful tenderness" well up in him.[44] The minor characters are as improbable as Morris. Yeats Hardestie, the effeminate brother of Felicia, asks Morris if he can "remember what it was like in your mother's womb?"[45] Schofield Hardestie, father of Yeats and Felicia, brags that "In every generation there was a Hardestie ready to protest that whatever arrangements the local authorities made weren't good enough...."[46] A moment later he claims that his life "has taken on a new wonderful beauty since I learned to cultivate my abdomen."[47] Communist characters "hiss," "whisper," and "dribble" their words when speaking; they wear beards, have "deathshead grins" on their faces, and seem to have completely taken over Hollywood.

Most Likely to Succeed is the ultimate step in "explaining society to the average man." Dos Passos has over-simplified his material and exaggerated his characters to such an extent that the novel seems totally unreal. Such pronounced weaknesses cause Most Likely to Succeed to be the worst of all Dos Passos' novels.

The well-intentioned men in The Grand Design take upon themselves the burden of acting as "custodians of the Republic." Their defeat could have been the subject of an inspired novel, as the defeat of other well-

intentioned men is the subject of U. S. A. But The Grand Design fails through propagandizing and over-simplification. The Great Days (1958) introduces another self-appointed custodian of the Republic, the aging newspaperman, Roland Lancaster. Like Millard Carroll and Paul Graves in The Grand Design, Lancaster is an intensely patriotic man who is betrayed by the New Deal administration. Now that the bureaucracy of Roosevelt has become entrenched under Truman, Lancaster has become a "backnumber" in the newspaper and magazine business. He has been branded a "reactionary" because his ideological views have not changed along with the changes in Washington, and he has no publishing outlet for his articles. The novel covers only a few days in Lancaster's life, but through flashback the entire period of the New Deal is repeated. As such The Great Days is a reiteration of The Grand Design plus large sections of Dos Passos' personal articles from State of the Nation and Tour of Duty.[48]

The Great Days is an unoriginal "whining monologue"[49] which is accurately described as "oppressive and in the deepest sense degrading."[50] Lancaster travels to Cuba with Elsa Haines, a frigid American chorus girl. Although Lancaster is thirty years her senior, he hopes to marry her--thus putting an end to the loneliness that has haunted him since his own wife died. But Elsa only takes Lancaster's money; she persuades him to buy whatever she wishes even though she knows he has drawn his life's savings for the trip. A Communist artist, the "nonobjective painter Pinillo," attaches himself to Elsa. Together they take advantage of Lancaster at every opportunity, forcing him to buy meals and drinks for all who happen by. After a series of improbable incidents involving

revolutionaries and witch doctors and culminating in the loss of his wallet, Lancaster realizes that loneliness is the price he must pay for patriotism. He sends the girl to Chicago, but he remains in Miami where he waits in the hope that "someday I may be needed."[51]

The plot of The Great Days is too superficial to be convincing. Obviously Dos Passos has merely contrived the incidents involving Elsa and Lancaster to disguise the real purpose of the novel. Well over half of The Great Days is flashback to the Roosevelt Administration. Roger Thurloe, a government official, is the subject of much of the flashback. He sends Lancaster to report on the war effort in the Pacific because the ordinary channels of information distort the important events. Over sixty consecutive pages are then devoted to Lancaster's travels in the Pacific. Roger Thurloe commits suicide after the war. He had opposed the New Deal concentration of power and President Roosevelt; in his death Lancaster reads "the failure of everything we had hoped for."[52]

Roger Thurloe is an ineffectual character. Dos Passos presents him as an opponent of evil, but Thurloe is a pathetic, fumbling man. He is continually over-worked, and no one listens to anything he says. His wife goes insane, and his friends turn on him; but he arouses no sympathy because he is personally too weak. The reader is only irritated that such an inept man is presented as a statesman. Lancaster, however, causes the failure of The Great Days. He is so pathetic in his attempts to seduce Elsa and so incapable of dealing with her parasitic friends that the reader is exasperated. One cannot believe that his ideas have validity when he is personally such a fool. One can find partial excuse for The Grand Design and Most Likely to Succeed on the grounds that they represent

Dos Passos' extreme fear of power and of Communism, but there can be no excuse for the blatant egomania of Roland Lancaster as he indulges in nostalgia and self-pity. Of all of Dos Passos' novels, only Most Likely to Succeed has less intrinsic literary merit than The Great Days.

Midcentury (1961) is Dos Passos' most comprehensive post-war effort; and though it is artistically superior to The Grand Design, Most Likely to Succeed, and The Great Days, it contains many of the same weaknesses. It too over-simplifies plot and character and subordinates the integrity of the whole to a specific didactic purpose. From the beginning, the reader can predict what is to come. Ideas are repeated again and again until the reader feels he is being "brainwashed"; biographies offer no variety and almost no human interest; prose-poems are common and uneven--in short, Midcentury is an awkward, clumsy book. Its intended theme is stated explicitly in the William Dean biography: "... spirit, the little spark of God in every man, is what keeps man alive in adversity."[53] Ironically, however, this theme is dissipated because the novel itself lacks spirit. Although Midcentury has received a few favorable reviews, most criticism has been harsh. Richard Horchler, for example, states that "the great weaknesses of Midcentury are its littleness and lack of any sustaining spirit.... There was rage in U. S. A., and anguish, and finally deep despair. Midcentury seems animated by nothing stronger than bafflement and spite."[54]

The main purpose of Midcentury is to attack labor unions. They are shown as highly organized and corrupt agencies of power which thwart individuality in the same way that monopoly capitalism thwarts individuality in U. S. A. Biographies of Harry Bridges, John L. Lewis, Walter Reuther,

Dan Tobin, Dave Beck, and James Hoffa depict grasping, selfish men who ruthlessly dominate labor. Clippings from newspapers reiterate labor union injustice; "Investigator's Notes" repeat essentially the same story of labor union racketeering seven times; and the life and death struggle of the central character is an extended case history of union corruption. In Midcentury, Dos Passos makes no attempt at subtlety. His subject is stated directly in the biography of Senator John McClellan:

> Denial of the working man's most elementary rights, the underworld's encroachment on the world of daily bread, sluggings, shootings, embezzlement, thievery, gangups between employers and business agents, the shakedown, the syndicate, oppression, sabotage, terror.[55]

Altogether Midcentury is a "fatigued and fatiguing book."[56] The biographies are seldom better than mediocre history, failing even to arouse enough emotion to be successful as propaganda. For example, the Douglas MacArthur biography presents a man for whom Dos Passos has definite sympathy, but it lacks totally the intensity that gives the biographies of U. S. A. their force:

> It was the old MacArthur who stepped out of the plane on his first Australian airstrip. The American collapse, Rommel in Africa, the loss of the British battleships off Singapore had scared the Australians out of a year's growth. Their military men were talking grimly of holding the Brisbane line. MacArthur showed no interest at all in the Brisbane line. He talked of invading the Philippines. He would only plan for victory.[57]

The fictional characters are also weak and uninteresting. The reader has difficulty in sympathizing with Terry Bryant as he endures persecution after persecution from union gangsters. His death is too carefully staged by the author to carry the impact ascribed to it. The reader simply cannot believe that "Terry Bryant ... died for freedom, like the Americans who stood up against the redcoats on Bunker Hill or who held out in Bataan

against the Japanese."[58] Willoughby Jenks, Bryant's employer in the fight against union domination, is an inadequate character for the role Dos Passos assigns to him. Jenks sees historical significance in his battle with the "Hackers Truckers and Longhaulers International Union"; his determination never wavers as his employees are beaten and killed. But after he has won the battle and achieved national recognition of his struggle for independence, he compromises his principles. Even though he has promised Bryant that he will not sell his cab company, he is shown making a lucrative "deal" at the close of the novel.

Certainly the most disgusting character in Midcentury is Blackie Bowman, an old I. W. W. member who is waiting to die in a veteran's hospital. Bowman is the character who speaks most directly for the author. Many of his experiences parallel those of minor characters in U. S. A. and of Dos Passos himself. He delivers pontifical statements regarding the change that has occurred in American society since the New Deal. He vilifies Roosevelt, socialism, and labor unions. His pronouncements supposedly represent the earned wisdom of a lifetime:

> All my life I been waiting for the Promised Land. We used to call it the revolution but all that means now is firing squads and jails. That's why I never accomplished anything in my life. Waiting for pie in the sky made nothing ever worth bearing down on. Then the organizations began to take over. Opened up the Promised Land to dues paying members only, and then only so long as you keep your trap shut.[59]

Bowman, along with the biographical and fictional characters, too obviously parrots Dos Passos' point of view. Although the characters of Midcentury are not as flat as those of Most Likely to Succeed and The Great Days, they lack the development necessary to make them seem believable human beings. Midcentury fails as a novel because Dos Passos is more concerned

with communicating his subject in direct terms than he is with creating art. Ultimately the reader must agree with Richard Chase when he comments that he too is disturbed "about corruption and all the ills and injustices in the modern labor movement" but would rather read a "good book on the subject" than be subjected to Dos Passos' didactic "fables."[60]

Four of Dos Passos' post-war novels employ structural methods reminiscent of those in U. S. A., but only Midcentury attempts anything approximating the complexity of the trilogy. U. S. A. includes biographies, prose-poems, camera eyes, and newsreels in addition to a unique interrelationship of fictional characters. These diverse structural elements contribute to the unity of the whole work. When the reader arrives at the climactic camera eye fifty, he feels that he is with those who "line the curbs in/ the drizzling rain .., crowd the wet sidewalks elbow to/ elbow silent pale looking with scared eyes at the coffins /Sacco and Vanzetti/"; and the reader joins his voice with the first person plural in its ultimate lament: "We stand defeated America."[61] The passionate outcry against oppression and injustice has the reader's full sympathy because he has gradually and subtly been led to this point by biographies, newsreels, and other camera eyes. The post-war novels contain nothing as structurally and artistically difficult because the author is concerned with direct statements for the benefit of the "average man."

The Grand Design uses only one of the structural techniques that distinguish U. S. A. Each of twenty chapters begins with a prose-poem that relates directly to the theme. These prose-poems have almost no poetic merit. For the most part, they are dialogues by farmers, sailors, miners, and others that the author manipulates for his specific purposes.

For example, chapter eight of the second part of The Grand Design begins with a prose-poem which shows a group of men discussing politics in a bar. An older man interrupts the conversation to speak directly of the New Deal:

> 'The trouble is that we live in a
> world where they've changed all the rules
> --seizure of power--
> the way the moneymasters changed the rules of business
> through interlocking directorates. In the modern state
> power is total...'
> '...You form a party of disciplined members with power
> as the single objective. You espouse the cause of the outof-
> work, the underpaid, the incompetent, the outcast; they are
> the wedge that splits society. You talk whatever language
> suits the moment, no matter what, so long as you get a dis-
> ciplined member into the driver's seat of the tradeunion, the
> professional association, the chamber of commerce, the cor-
> poration, the political party...'[62]

Prose-poems in The Grand Design are repetitive, biased manipulations by the author. They have little intrinsic merit and could be omitted from the novel without adversely affecting it.

Where structural technique is irrelevant to the failure of The Grand Design, it is instrumental to the failure of Chosen Country. The story of Jay Pignatelli is too often interrupted by "biography" and flashback. Jay is the focal point of the novel; his movement toward the affirmation of country as symbolized by his marriage to Lulie Harrington holds the reader's interest. When his story is interrupted by biographies which do not specifically apply to him--such as those of Eliot Story Bradford and Anne Comfort Welsh--the novel loses momentum. Even more harmful than the biographies are the extended flashbacks to cover's Jay's personal history. At a crucial point in the novel, Lulie calls Jay to arrange the meeting which will culminate in their marriage. She replaces the telephone, and the chapter ends. The biography of Elisha Croft intervenes for eighteen pages before the reader is returned to the main plot. Jay is then shown

as he replaces the telephone; but before he moves from his seat, his memory traces the entire history of his involvement in the Sabantini /Sacco and Vanzetti/ case--an episode which covers 114 consecutive pages!

Like Chosen Country, The Great Days depends far too heavily on flashback. The story of Roland Lancaster's misadventures in Cuba is an obvious structural device to allow the author free play in "remembering" the past. Out of a total of 312 pages, 174 pages recount the history of the New Deal and Lancaster's travels as a reporter. An even worse fault of The Great Days is its superficial shifts from the first to the third person. The Cuban episodes are told in the third person; but when Lancaster exercises his total recall, he uses the first person. This causes the reader even more difficulty in accepting the Lancaster of the Cuban episodes as a believable character. He is shown in the first person as a sophisticated, multi-lingual world traveler; but with Elsa in Cuba, Lancaster is naive, fumbling, and often incoherent. The reader cannot accept the two men as the same person. As a result, Lancaster's intent to wait in Miami until America needs him seems less noble than ludicrous.

Many of the structural innovations of U. S. A. are used in Midcentury. Prose-poems, newspaper cuttings, biographies, and inter-locking prose fictions state and restate union injustice and racketeering. In place of the camera eyes of U. S. A., Dos Passos substitutes the seven "Investigator's Notes" as a corollary to the other denunciations of the modern labor movement. The weakness of Midcentury as a whole owes greatly to the weakness of these separate structural devices. The biographies are discussed above as insipid histories of twentieth century figures. The newspaper

cuttings and prose-poems require separate consideration.

The newspaper cuttings in U. S. A. achieve a fine balance between objectivity and irony. The irony is seldom so direct that the reader is fully conscious of it; instead the reader is mildly amused by the contradictions between the claims made by newspapers which support monopoly capitalism and objective accounts of injustice. Snatches of popular songs and irrelevant material separate statements which relate to the theme and contribute toward making the contradiction subtle. The irony of the newsreels thus has a cumulative effect as it gradually directs the reader toward complete empathy with camera eye fifty. In Midcentury, however, Dos Passos has no patience for subtlety. The newspaper cuttings often make direct statements of the theme. For example, "Documentary (11)" contains five items which relate directly to labor unions, one of which concludes with the question, "Did it ever occur to you that these union bosses do not speak for the working man, but for the union bosses?"[63]

The prose-poems in U. S. A. are for the most part sensitive and beautiful; as emotional expressions many of them attain the dignity of true poetry. 1919 concludes with a powerful denunciation of war in the prose-poem "The Body of an American." Dos Passos traces a poetic history of the unknown soldier from his birth through his burial at Arlington National Cemetery. The excerpt below gives an example of its emotional expressiveness:

> John Doe was born (thudding din of blood in love
> into the shuddering soar of a man and a woman alone
> indeed together lurching into
> and ninemonths sick drowse waking into scared
> agony and the pain and blood and mess of birth). John
> Doe was born
> and raised in Brooklyn, in Memphis, near the lake-

> front in Cleveland, Ohio, in the stench of the stockyards in Chi, on Beacon Hill, in an old brick house in Alexandria Virginia, on Telegraph Hill, in a halftimbered Tudor cottage in Portland the city of roses,...[64]

The prose-poems in Midcentury, although superior to those in The Grand Design, are far inferior to the prose-poems in U. S. A. Dos Passos uses an excessive amount of alliteration; the diction is often awkward and self-conscious as if the author is not truly involved with his subject. The introductory prose-poem in Midcentury presents a first person narrator walking his dog late at night. He muses on life at midcentury as his dog plays about in the underbrush:

> But rockets successfully soar and satellites trundle on their punctual trails above the stratosphere. Sam the Rhesus returns in his space capsule, his little face as inscrutable as when he went up. An aeronaut from a twelvemilehigh balloon spies moisture in the Venustian atmosphere. Norbert Wiener says his calculators are hep; watch out if they get a will of their own. A certain Dr. Otto Struve has predicted the possibility of ten million lifebreeding planets among the island galaxies, and, at Green Bank, West Virginia
> (far from the sins of the world)
> they are building a radio telescope the size of a baseballfield, tipped sixty stories up in the air, where the physicists of project Osma plan to listen for messages emitted with intelligent intent
> from tau Ceti or epsilon Eridani.[65]

Other prose-poems in Midcentury are equally disappointing; the subjects are conventional; the style is more like prose than poetry. When the reader finishes Midcentury and reflects on the mediocrity of its structural techniques, he can easily understand Richard Horchler's complaint that "the once sure hand of the master is now fumbling and uncertain."[66]

Much of the success of U. S. A. owes to its intensely vigorous style--or what Daniel Aaron prefers to call "sacred passion."[67] Critics are virtually unanimous in attributing the stylistic power of U. S. A. to Dos Passos' intense involvement in his material. As Joseph Warren Beach

points out, Dos Passos submerges his personality in the material of U. S. A.[68] The fictional characters, the biographical characters, and the camera eyes seem to be extensions of the author. The vividly imagined biography of Frank Lloyd Wright, for example, concludes with words that can as easily apply to Dos Passos himself:

> only in freedom can we build the Usonian city.
> His plans are coming to life. His blueprints, as once
> Walt Whitman's words, stir the young men:--
> Frank Lloyd Wright,
> patriarch of the new building,
> not without honor except in his own country.[69]

Only Chosen Country of the post-war novels compares to the imaginative conviction of U. S. A. In the others, the author seems to stand to one side, manipulating his material for pre-conceived effects. Midcentury ends with the flight of an American teenager who escapes from home by using stolen credit cards. The youth is intended to represent the revolt of the young from their fathers' bewildering world, but the dialogue is so awkward and false that the reader is disturbed:

> They say teenagers are screwy but it's the adults who are really nuts. At teenage parties we have a nice happy violent time getting rid of our frustrations. We have fun. But these damned adults, all the poor clods do is sit there beating their brains out over their liquor. It was that egghead way they just sat there, drinking sips out of their drinks with their little fingers crooked, smiling like it was all just too cute to blow up the whole goddam human race, that got me started. That's nothing to smile about.[70]

There is no enigma involved in the extreme difference between the style of the pre-war and the post-war novels. The explanation is that Dos Passos is less concerned with art than with direct communication in his post-war novels. Although he "is basically a poet, with all the intense emotions of a poet, and a poet's eye,"[71] he chooses to abandon the creation

of art in order to "work for the commonwealth." One cannot impugn his seriousness as a citizen nor attack him on ideological grounds--one certainly cannot denounce Milton for assuming a social role--but the reader who is so stirred by the passion of U. S. A. bitterly regrets Dos Passos' post-war forfeiture of art.

NOTES

CHARPTER IV

[1]Dos Passos in an interview in 1941, quoted in John Wrenn, John Dos Passos, p. 187.

[2]Dos Passos, "The Duty of a Writer," quoted in Thomas R. Gorman, "Words and Deeds: A Study of the Political Attitudes of John Dos Passos," p. 177.

[3]Wrenn, John Dos Passos, p. 182.

[4]Dos Passos, quoted in Wrenn, John Dos Passos, p. 182.

[5]Dos Passos, "A Note on Fitzgerald," The Crack-Up, p. 340.

[6]Geismar, American Moderns from Rebellion to Conformity, p. 81.

[7]Chase, "The Chronicles of Dos Passos," p. 400.

[8]Geismar, American Moderns from Rebellion to Conformity, p. 76.

[9]Each novel of District of Columbia contains a political martyrdom by a Spotswood, but Herbert Spotswood in The Grand Design (Boston, 1949) is a secondary character. The emphasis of each novel is quite different, so much that the three are not a trilogy in the same sense that U. S. A. is a trilogy.

[10]Gorman states the theme of The Grand Design as follows: "The theme of the book is the corruption of ideals by power too long held and power too far removed from the inspection of the citizens." p. 188.

[11]Dos Passos, The Grand Design, p. 268.

[12]Ibid., p. 162.

[13]Ibid., p. 143.

[14]Compare articles collected in Dos Passos, The Theme is Freedom; see p. 236, pp. 245-248, p. 250, pp. 255-260.

[15]Dos Passos, The Grand Design, p. 141.

[16]Ibid., p. 160.

[17]Ibid., p. 405.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid., p. 293.

[20]Ibid., p. 321-322.

[21]Ibid., p. 342. Such perjorative references to Roosevelt illustrate Dos Passos' extreme hatred of him.

[22]Gorman, "Words and Deeds: A Study of the Political Attitudes of John Dos Passos," p. 188. The Secretary of Agriculture is shown as a malicious, superstitious man throughout The Grand Design. He has the hand-writing of his contemporaries "analyzed" by Madame Arno and becomes involved in a near-scandal when she gains possession of his personal letters. See The Grand Design, pp. 307-308.

[23]Dos Passos, The Grand Design, p. 354.

[24]Ibid., p. 370.

[25]Ibid., pp. 303-304.

[26]Ibid., p. 383.

[27]Geismar, American Moderns from Rebellion to Conformity, p. 84.

[28]Gelfant, "The Search for Identity in the Novels of John Dos Passos," p. 146.

[29]Ibid., p. 148.

[30]Dos Passos, Chosen Country (Boston, 1951), p. 91.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid., p. 337.

[33]Ibid., p. 422.

[34]Ibid., p. 332.

[35]Ibid., p. 271.

[36]Ibid., p. 274.

[37]Ibid., p. 110.

[38]Ibid., p. 485.

[39]Harrison Smith, "Welding the Past and Present," Saturday Review of Literature, December 15, 1951, p. 20.

[40]Horchler, "Prophet Without Hope," p. 16.

[41]George D. Murphy, review of Most Likely to Succeed, Commonweal, October 8, 1954, p. 20.

[42]Dos Passos, Most Likely to Succeed (New York, 1954), p. 60.

[43]Harold Clurman, "Communists by Dos Passos," The Nation, CLXXIX (October 9, 1954), p. 310.

[44]Dos Passos, Most Likely to Succeed, p. 71.

[45]Ibid., p. 75.

[46]Ibid., p. 84.

[47]Ibid., p. 85.

[48]Dos Passos, State of the Nation (Boston, 1944) and Tour of Duty (Boston, 1946) are compilations of opinion and reporting.

[49]Horchler, "Prophet Without Hope," p. 16.

[50]Geismar, American Moderns from Rebellion to Conformity, p. 85.

[51]Dos Passos, The Great Days (New York, 1958), p. 312.

[52]Ibid., p. 285.

[53]Dos Passos, Midcentury (Boston, 1961), p. 421.

[54]Horchler, "Prophet Without Hope," p. 14.

[55]Dos Passos, Midcentury, p. 272.

[56]Horchler, "Prophet Without Hope," p. 14.

[57]Dos Passos, Midcentury, p. 12.

[58]Ibid., p. 468.

[59]Ibid., p. 61.

[60]Chase, "The Chronicles of Dos Passos," p. 397.

[61]Dos Passos, The Big Money, p. 464.

[62]Dos Passos, The Grand Design, p. 288.

[63]Dos Passos, Midcentury, p. 147.

[64]Dos Passos, 1919, p. 468.

[65]Dos Passos, Midcentury, p. 4.

[66]Horchler, "Prophet Without Hope," p. 13.

[67]Aaron, "The Riddle of John Dos Passos," p. 60.

[68]Joseph Warren Beach, "Dos Passos 1947," Sewanee Review, LV (July, 1947), p. 414.

[69]Dos Passos, The Big Money, p. 432.

[70]Dos Passos, Midcentury, pp. 488-489.

[71]W. M. Frohock, "John Dos Passos...Of Time and Frustration," The Novel of Violence in America (Dallas, 1950), p. 20.

CONCLUSION

The myth of John Dos Passos the "Communist" which circulated so extensively in the twenties and thirties has now been supplanted with the equally erroneous myth of Dos Passos the "reactionary." Like all myths, both of these had some initial justification. Dos Passos supported the Communists in the twenties and he supports "right-wing" groups in the sixties--but his support of both is based on the same set of reasons. As a philosophical conservative who opposes all concentrations of power, Dos Passos supports whatever means are available at the moment for the practical purpose of shifting the balance of power away from any extreme. Dos Passos has not vacillated in his ideological views; but during the course of forty years, he has maintained a constant ideology while the forces of power have altered continually. Once the Communists seemed to provide a functional opposition to the power of monopoly capitalism. When Communism proved to be an even more awesome monolith of power than Capitalism, Dos Passos supported the middle position and affirmed the first few years of the New Deal. As Roosevelt concentrated power in governmental bureaucracy, Dos Passos once again made his "practical" movement to the opposition, this time to the republicanism of Taft. During the fifties and sixties, Dos Passos has opposed governmental concentration of powers under both Truman and Eisenhower. His ideological position has not wavered: he opposes any large concentration of power,

whether Capitalism, Communism, Fascism, or bureaucratic socialism. Through the social turbulence of almost half a century, Dos Passos has worked for individual freedom, tolerance, and social justice. He has used politics as the most practical method to sustain the power balance necessary to continue the traditions of his idealistic democracy.

As an artist, however, Dos Passos has not maintained a constancy comparable to his ideology. His post-war novels advocate the same philosophical conservatism as the pre-war novels, but the post-war novels dispense too much with the sense of objectivity that is essential to believable fiction. Dos Passos believes that he cannot communicate with the average public unless he eliminates all possibility of misunderstanding; in his post-war novels, he forfeits the detachment necessary for enduring art and contrives didactic fiction for the consumption of his chosen public. Those commentators who argue that Dos Passos has "lost" his ability to create expressive and enduring fiction overlook the fact that Dos Passos has chosen to write his post-war novels in the way they are written. One must only read the Jay Pignatelli sections of Chosen Country to realize that Dos Passos retains the expressive abilities that make U. S. A. a great work. The passage below, for example, captures Jay's loneliness in prose which equals even the biographies of U. S. A.

> The dead air the churn of the quadruple propellors as the liner pounded out her twentytwo knots for the fiveday crossing.... There was nothing in the world he wanted except to lie there. From out of a swaddling cocoon of discomfort and solitude he .., felt himself, like some darkage monk radiating shafts of prayer from his cell, shooting searching rays of his wretchedness that travelled inquisitively over the great ball of the world. In the field of that chill searchlight unsatisfactory puppets, selves left behind on distant shores, gesticulated.[1]

Dos Passos has not suffered an "emotional loss"[2] that affects his ability to create art. He has merely utilized his post-war writing as another practical means to communicate his ideology. The failure of the post-war novels is due to the fact that he over-simplifies his material in his effort to be more direct than enduring art allows.

NOTES

CONCLUSION

[1]Dos Passos, Chosen Country, p. 334.

[2]Aaron, "The Riddle of John Dos Passos," p. 3. This is the standard critical explanation of the inferiority of Dos Passos' post-war novels. Compare Horchler, "Prophet Without Hope," p. 14, and Chase, "The Chronicles of Dos Passos," p. 396.

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